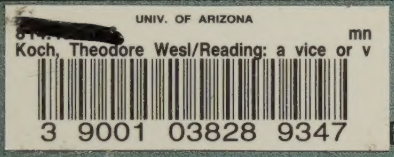


A E?

By THEODORE WESLEY KOCH

*

THE ESSENCE OF POETRY

By SIR RENNELL RODD

*

STANDARDS OF VALUE IN FICTION

By FRANKLYN BLISS SNYDER

* * *
* * *
* *

University of Dayton

DAYTON, OHIO: 1929

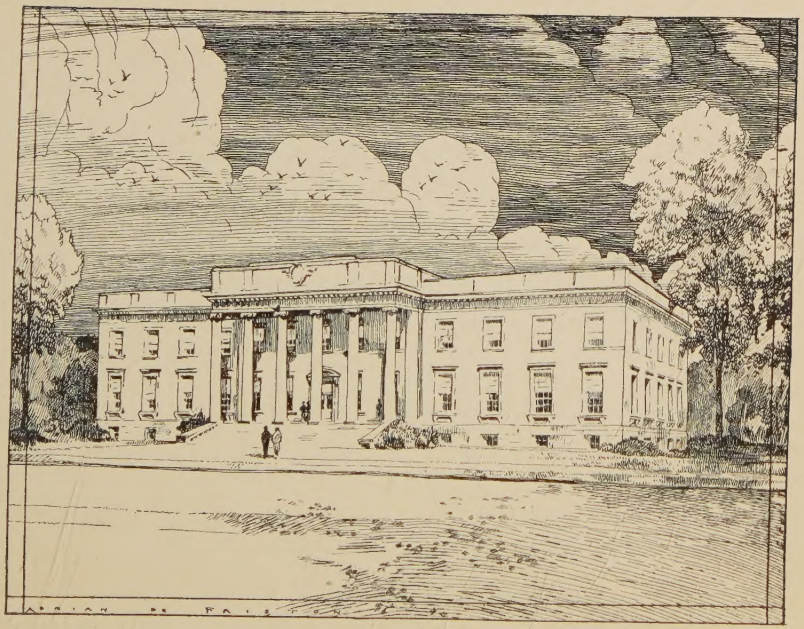
Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/essenceofpoetry0000renn

Reading, a Vice or a Virtue?

The Essence of Poetry

Standards of Value
in Fiction



Albert Emanuel Library, University of Dayton

READING:
A VICE OR A VIRTUE?

By THEODORE WESLEY KOCH

*

THE ESSENCE OF POETRY

By SIR RENNELL RODD

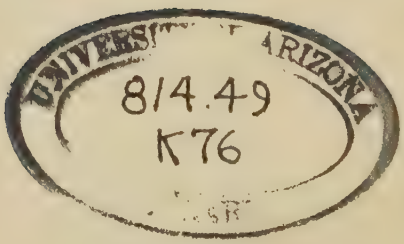
*

STANDARDS OF VALUE IN FICTION

By FRANKLYN BLISS SNYDER

* *
*

University of Dayton
DAYTON, OHIO: 1929


814.49
K76

A Library Miscellany

Issued as a

Souvenir of the Dedication of the

ALBERT EMANUEL LIBRARY

Presented to the

University of Dayton by

VICTOR EMANUEL

71770

PREFACE

THE *Very Reverend Bernard P. O'Reilly, President of the University of Dayton, honored me with an invitation to give an address at the dedication of the Albert Emanuel Library, which took place June 10, 1928. I chose for my theme on that occasion the general subject of the place of the library in the modern university and then followed with some remarks on reading. As a souvenir of the completion of the library building and as a testimonial of their appreciation of the generosity of Mr. Victor Emanuel in presenting this splendid tribute to his father, Mr. Albert Emanuel, The Trustees voted to publish a new edition of my "Reading, a Vice or a Virtue?" To this I have added an address on "The Essence of Poetry" by Sir Rennell Rodd, which that dis-*

tinguished diplomat and scholar gave at various American universities during his recent visit in the United States; and an address which Professor Franklyn Bliss Snyder, my colleague at Northwestern University, has given on several occasions: "Standards of Value in Fiction." These two addresses are here published for the first time and constitute a body of good doctrine with wise counsel on cultural reading.

President Coolidge dedicated the Lincoln Memorial Library of the State College, at Brookings, South Dakota, last September, and spoke of the function of the college library in the following words:

"There has been a long-standing controversy over the question of what constitutes an institution of learning, especially a college. Some contend that it is the trustees, others the faculty, still others the student body. I suspect that it is the combination of all of these, and the better the

quality of each the better the institution will be. But there is yet another element which has come to be all-important in modern scholarship. That is the library. While the teacher is the instrumentality and the directing force, to a very large extent, for the training of youth and the diffusion of knowledge, books are, after all, the repository of learning. Without them the wide scope of modern scholarship would of course be entirely impossible, and no college would feel itself adequately equipped for the best service which was not provided with a well chosen and extensive library. Books contain not only the priceless records of the past, but they are to a large extent the hope of the future. By means of them we have revealed to us the inventions and discoveries of science, the beauties of poetry, and the imperishable thoughts of the master minds of all the ages. A liberal education may begin in the classroom, but it will scarcely rise above mediocrity unless

it is extended into the library and by that means broadened into the practical experience of life.''

Herbert Spencer, visiting America in 1882, met many men of note, observed keenly, and admonished us to mend our ways. He found us guilty of absorption in the piling up of wealth, such as no organism can stand. It has made our lives one-sided, said he. We have neither leisure nor taste for other things, for matters of culture, the contemplation and recreation which add so much to the joy and beauty and healthfulness of life. So he urged us to practice the gospel of relaxation.

A generation later, Viscount Grey paid us a visit. He chose the subject of ''Recreation'' for his parting address before the Harvard Union, the basic thought being the same as Spencer's. He found the four essentials to happiness were: 1. Moral standards by which to guide our actions; 2. Satisfactory home life; 3. Some form of work which justifies our existence; 4. Some degree of

leisure and the use of it in such a way as to make us happy.

All are agreed that man's happiness and success depend more on what he is than on what he has. There are two forms of recreation which are of almost universal appeal among cultivated people: first, the observation of nature; secondly, the reading of books. These are available to young and old, rich and poor, at all seasons of the year.

Most Americans read books to kill time, to make more money, or to gain prestige socially. Yet great books do not kill time, for they strive to give time and eternity a new meaning. Glory does not come from reading books but from simplicity. The external pageant of life is so fascinating that Americans do not need to turn their gaze inward, to find a defensive armor against life. Dr. Samuel Johnson said that a book should either show one how to enjoy life or how to endure it. The

student of the classics may view the hurry of modern life with the same detachment as that shown by a visitor from another part of the globe.

Professor John Erskine, of Columbia University, has given us some helpful advice as to the method of reading great books. It is a simple one. Briefly it is this: Try not to be awed by their greatness. *Read without any other preparation than what life has given you. Open the pages and find out how much they mean to you. If you find your own experiences reflected in certain parts of the book and not in others, do not worry about those blind spots. They may be the fault of the book. It may be out of date in those places. It is more prudent to suppose, what is just as likely, that your own experience is perhaps a little thin in the regions with which those parts of the book dealt. To test this out, read the book a second time, and, if necessary, a third time. Whether or not the repeated readings clear up the difficult*

passages, they will show you new meanings in the parts you have already understood. When you find these blind spots in books supposed to be masterpieces, and when you are humble enough to explain them by some insufficiency in yourself, the impulse is to seek for help in other books, that is, to read the critics. But it is much more profitable to go directly to life itself. Professor Erskine would not say that no aid can be had from other people. He could not hold that tenet and go on teaching literature to college students. But the best teachers, in his opinion, try to suggest the experiences which such passages are designed to reflect. They remind one of experiences mislaid for the moment. They can only remind; they cannot impart. "We can overhaul our experience, to find the material needed to understand the book," Professor Erskine concludes. "We can open our eyes to the life about us, and find the material there. It is fatal to suppose that the great writer

was too wise or too profound for us ever to understand him; to think of art so is not to praise but to murder it, for the next step after that tribute is neglect of the masterpiece. It is advisable to sample as many of the great books as we can, for the first ones we come to may not be those which reflect us most completely. But once we have found our author, we have only to read him over and over, and after a while to read out from him, in the authors who seem kindred spirits. The reader who has found himself in two great authors is fairly launched. But the books should be read over and over. Until we have discovered that certain books grow with our maturing experience and other books do not, we have not learned how to distinguish a great book *from a book.*"

Robert Browning once said, in substance, that things of value have to be dug out, whether it is the case of the mind or of the earth. One cannot read a work on metaphysics as one is accustomed

to read the ordinary book of the day. Every page and frequently the individual sentence or phrase must be studied over by the conscientious reader. Thus only can the book carry its full message to the reader. He who reads it through at a gallop will not have read it at all.

T. W. K.

Northwestern University Library
Evanston, Illinois
June 25, 1928

THE BRITISH MUSEUM
From an unpublished pencil sketch by Herbert G. Hampton

ILLUSTRATIONS

Albert Emanuel Library, University of Dayton . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING

The British Museum xvii
From an unpublished pencil sketch by Herbert G. Hampton

Reading Room, British Museum 2
From an unpublished pencil sketch by Eric G. Scott

Main Entrance, La Bibliothèque Nationale 6
From an unpublished pen-and-ink sketch by Albert Gasse

Main Reading Room, La Bibliothèque Nationale 7
From an unpublished pencil sketch by Eric G. Scott

Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Mazarine Gallery 14
From an unpublished drawing by Eric G. Scott

Les Bouquinistes, Paris 15
From the color etching by T. François Simon

Bibliothèque Mazarine, Paris 22
From an unpublished drawing by Eric G. Scott

A Corner in the Mazarine Library, Paris. 23
From an unpublished drawing by Eric G. Scott

The Newsmonger 30
From the painting by Adrian van Ostade (1673) engraved by Janinet

Don Quixote Reading the Books of Knighthood and Chivalry . 31
From a drawing by Tony Johannot

In a Benedictine Monastery 38
From an etching by J. Torné after A. Lynch

FACING

The Meditative Scholar (Korea) 39
From a colored wood block by Elizabeth Keith

Monastic Library, Subiaco, Italy 46
From an etching by L. Gaucherel after a painting by Th. Ethofer

The Librarian 47
From the painting by Eduard von Grützner

The Reader 54
From an etching by Meissonier

An Eighteenth-Century Scholar 55
From a painting by A. Canella

A Booklover in the Library of Richelieu 62
From an etching by A. Barry, after a painting by Mariano Fortuny

Goethe Reading in His Room (Rome, 1786–87) 63
Contemporary sketch by Wilhelm Tischbein

Harper Memorial Library, University of Chicago. Viewed from the Court 70
From an etching by Owen Selwyn

An Old Book-Shop, Chicago 71
From an etching by Ralph Fletcher Seymour

Group of Readers 78
From the Alexandre Dumas, père, statue in Paris

Columbia University Library 79
From an unpublished pen-and-ink sketch by Adrian de Friston

Reading 86
From a portrait study of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Deering

The Traveling Companion 87
From an etching by Anders Zorn

Widener Memorial Library, Harvard University 96
From an unpublished pen-and-ink sketch by Albert Gasse

FACING

Inner Temple Library, London 97
From an unpublished pen-and-ink sketch by Albert Gasse

Bates Hall, Boston Public Library (Catalogues). 106
From an unpublished pen-and-ink sketch by Adrian de Friston

Bates Hall, Boston Public Library (Reading Room) . . . 107
From an unpublished pen-and-ink sketch by Adrian de Friston

Middle Temple Library, London 114
From an unpublished pen-and-ink sketch by Adrian de Friston

The London Library, St. James' Square 115
From an unpublished pen-and-ink sketch by Adrian de Friston

READING, A VICE OR A VIRTUE?

"DESPITE the respect I feel for higher education, I think that reading is more important than anything your instructors can teach you," said wise old Ernest Renan to the young student Romain Rolland.

The art of reading,—not merely the choice of books but the attempt to master their contents,—seems to me to warrant an examination of the methods or lack of method in our everyday reading, and to justify a study of the opinions held by certain critics and scholars as to the best way in which to read. Surely if we are to accomplish any definite end through reading it cannot be attained by haphazard means. There must be some kind of a preconceived plan. One of the chief advantages of a college course is that there the

required reading is supervised and made the basis of discussions and papers by the student.

The art of reading has been made the subject of studies by several English and American writers. Chief among these are "The Art of Reading" by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch; "The Lost Art of Reading" by Gerald Stanley Lee; and "How to Read" by J. B. Kerfoot. In addition to these (which are readily accessible and so will not be discussed here) there are two works in French and one in German to which I wish to call special attention and to analyze, since they are not available in English.

Of course, reading in itself is not a virtue. There is no particular merit in merely reading a lot of books. We must make sure that they are worth while and that they are read worthily. Some books only tend to vulgarize the taste. Many can add nothing to one's mental stature. They do not stimulate thought. The mind can be virtually drugged by reading, by over-doses of trashy fiction, by too constant poring over miscellaneous popular periodicals and newspapers.

As La Bruyere puts it, "A fool reads a book and understands nothing in it. A witling reads it and

READING ROOM, BRITISH MUSEUM
From an unpublished pencil sketch by Eric G. Scott

fancies he is perfectly master of it all without exception. A man of discernment does not comprehend it entirely but distinguishes what is clear from what is obscure, while certain poseurs will have those passages dark which are not and affect not to understand what is really intelligible."

An excellent test consists of seeing how a given person reacts to a given book or article, how he reads it and what he gets out of it. This is the method constantly in use in certain class rooms and it gives the instructor a real insight into the working of the pupil's mind.

Professor William Bennett Munro of Harvard says that twenty-five years ago, when he began his work as a teacher in a small New England college, he tried the experiment of giving his students a list of good books which they were expected to read and study for themselves. This, he soon found out, was an unheard-of innovation, and it did not meet with popular favor. One of the students said to him very frankly: "We don't think you are playing fair. As we understand it, you are paid by the college to read these books and tell us what is in them. Instead of that you tell us to go read them for ourselves."

"That," comments Professor Munro, "was his naïve conception of the royal road to learning, and I suspect that he was by no means unique among college undergraduates. Even today, I am afraid, there are thousands of parents in this country who look upon an institution of learning as a sort of retail emporium from which the payment of an annual tuition fee entitles their sons to draw as many units as though it were flour or molasses."*

The attitude of the average college student of today towards extra-curriculum reading, is puzzling to many a graduate of an earlier generation, who in his student days made all sorts of sacrifices in order to buy books not merely for the pleasure of reading them, but also for the enjoyment, equally keen, of owning them.

When taking up a book with a view to reading it, one instinctively asks the question: "What shall I get out of it? Information or entertainment, self-discipline, or only the satisfaction of being able to say that I have read a best seller about which everybody is talking?" Naturally you will go about your reading differently according to what your purpose is.

* *Harvard Graduates' Magazine*, Dec., 1925.

One advanced middle-aged maiden scolded young Richard Kane for not having read D. H. Lawrence's latest novel, which had been out about six months. "Have you read Dante?" he asked. "Been out about six hundred years."

"Books have certain advantages which men have not," writes Brandes.* "They set thoughts in motion, —which men seldom do. They are silent when questions are not asked of them; men are seldom so discreet. And books are seldom so inane as people. One feels frequently like applying to the mass of humanity those words of Goethe: 'If they were books, I would not read them.'"

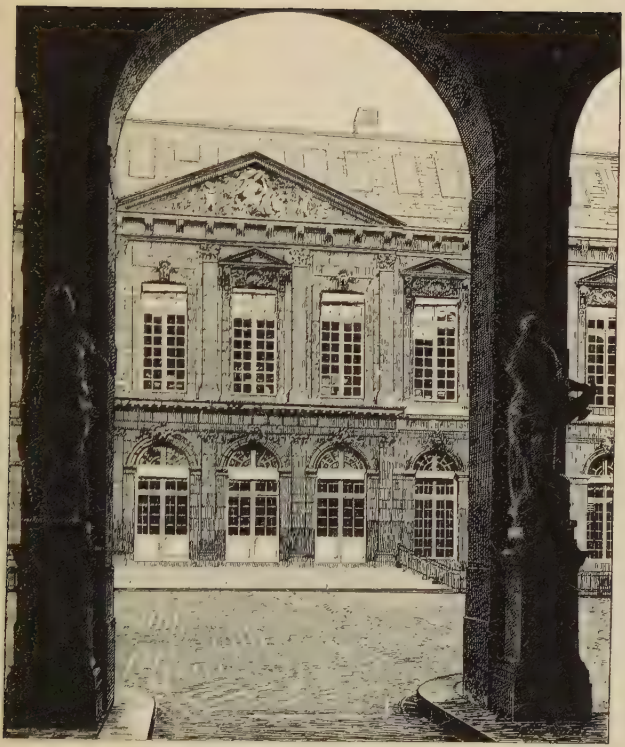
"Have you ever rightly considered what the mere ability to read means?" asked Lowell. "That it is the key which admits us to the whole world of thought and fancy and imagination, to the company of saint and sage, of the wisest and wittiest at their wisest and wittiest moments? That it enables us to see with the keenest eyes, hear with the finest ears, and listen to the sweetest voices of all time? More than that, it annihilates time and space for us."

* "On Reading; an Essay" by George Brandes (New York, Duffield, 1923).

Killing Time

While reading can annihilate time there is little profit to be gained from it when used merely as a means of killing time. Let me illustrate this by giving in outline one of the stories of Anton Chekhov. In his weird tale "The Bet," a young man agrees to spend fifteen years in solitary confinement, under the strictest supervision. For fifteen years he was not to cross the threshold of the lodge in which he was to be confined, not to see human beings, not to hear the human voice, nor to receive letters and newspapers. He was allowed to have a musical instrument and books in any quantity by writing an order, but could only receive them through a small window.

In the first year the books he sent for were principally of a light character,—novels with a complicated love plot, sensational and fantastic stories, and so on. In the second year the prisoner asked only for the classics. In the fifth year those who watched him through the window reported that all that year he spent doing nothing but eating and drinking and lying on his bed. He did not read books. In the second half of the sixth year the prisoner began zealously studying



Main Entrance
LA BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE, PARIS
From an unpublished pen-and-ink sketch by
Albert Gasse

Main Reading Room
La Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
From an unpublished pencil sketch by Eric G. Scott

languages, philosophy, and history. He threw himself eagerly into these studies,—so much so that it was hard to keep him supplied with the books asked for. In a note to his jailer he said: "The geniuses of all ages and of all lands speak different languages, but the same flame burns in all of them. Oh, if you only knew what unearthly happiness my soul feels now from being able to understand them!"

After the tenth year, the prisoner sat immovably at the table and read nothing but the Gospels. It seemed strange to his jailer that a man who in four years had mastered six hundred volumes should waste nearly a year over *one thin book* so easy of comprehension. Theology and histories of religion followed the Gospels.

In the last two years of his confinement the prisoner read an immense quantity of books quite indiscriminately. At one time he was busy with the natural sciences; then he would ask for Byron or Shakespeare. There were notes in which he demanded at the same time books on chemistry and medicine, philosophy or theology,—and a novel. His reading suggested a man swimming in the sea amidst the wreckage of his ship and trying to save his life by greedily clutching first at one spar and then at another.

But just before the long term of voluntary imprisonment was ended they found that he had escaped, had renounced the sum agreed upon in the wager and had left this note:

"For fifteen years I have been intently studying earthly life. It is true I have not seen the earth nor men, but in your books I have drunk fragrant wine, I have sung songs, I have hunted stags and wild boars in the forest, have loved women. Beauties as ethereal as clouds, created by the magic of your poets and geniuses, have visited me at night, and have whispered in my ears wonderful tales that have set my brain in a whirl. In your books I have climbed to the peaks of Elburz and Mont Blanc, and from there I have seen the sun rise and have watched it at evening flood the sky, the ocean, and the mountaintops with gold and crimson. I have watched from there the lightning flashing over my head and cleaving the storm clouds. I have seen green forests, fields, rivers, lakes, towns. I have heard the singing of the sirens, and the strains of the shepherds' pipes; I have touched the wings of the comely devils who flew down to converse with me of God. In your books I have flung myself in the bottomless pit, performed miracles, slain, burned towns, preached new religions, conquered whole kingdoms."

The man, no longer young, broken in body and spirit, willingly forfeited the bounty he was to have received. He renounced it all.

This man had read without rhyme or reason. He had no purpose, no plan. He had read merely to kill time. How many people today are reading simply to pass the time, or for mild excitement? Is Chekhov's story an allegory of a man's school, college and university life? Certainly the young man, like too many others, had not made his reading serve a purpose, prepare him for a life work—or give him a sustaining philosophy. He might have answered the question of Polonius: "What do you read, my lord?" in the same manner as did Hamlet: "Words, words, words!" To him the world had become but a blur of printed paper. He had lost his reason by too much reading without judgment, too much poring over books without a balanced ration of action.

As Milton phrased it, he

"Who reads
Incessantly and to his reading brings not
A spirit and judgment equal or superior,
Uncertain and unsettled still remain:
Deep-versed in books but shallow in himself."

Excessive Reading

This same thought is developed by Schopenhauer, who points out that in reading the author thinks for us, —we merely follow in his steps and repeat his mental processes. The great part of the thinking is done for us, and that is why it relieves us to take up a book after having been occupied with our own thoughts. In reading, the mind is, in fact, only the playground of another's thoughts. As a result, if one applies himself too assiduously to reading, he gradually loses the capacity for thinking. "This is the case with many learned persons," says Schopenhauer, "they have read themselves stupid. For to occupy every spare moment in reading, and to do nothing but read, is even more paralyzing to the mind than constant manual labor, which at least allows those engaged in it to follow their own thoughts. A steel spring never free from the pressure of some foreign body at last loses its elasticity; and so does the mind, if other people's thoughts are constantly forced upon it. Just as you can ruin the stomach and impair the whole body by taking too much nourishment, so you can overfill and choke the mind by feeding it too much.

The more you read, the fewer are the traces left by what you have read. The mind becomes like a tablet crossed over and over with writing. There is no time for ruminating, and in no other way can you assimilate what you have read. If you read on and on without setting your own thoughts to work, what you have read can not strike root, and is generally lost. It is, in fact, just the same with mental as with bodily food; hardly the fifth part of what one takes is assimilated."

John Timbs, in his "Clubs and Club Life in London," in speaking of the Wittinagemot of the Chapter Coffee-house, tells of a Mr. Murray, the registrar, "an Episcopal Scotch minister, who generally sat in one place from nine in the morning till nine at night; and was famous for having read, at least once through, every morning and evening paper published in London during the last thirty years. His memory being good, he was appealed to whenever any point of fact within the memory of man happened to be disputed. *It was often remarked, however, that such incessant daily reading did not tend to clear his views.*"

Reading can become a vice, a mere excuse for not taking the trouble to think, a means of getting away

from ourselves,—the merest idle pastime. Such is skimming over the pages of our voluminous Sunday newspapers, turning from a write-up of the latest scandal to an account of an automobile show, getting a glimpse of pictures of a notable wedding while fumbling the pages, then glancing aimlessly at the sporting and financial news, real estate and want advertisements.

This kind of reading justifies the remark of the old New England sea captain who refused to contribute to the establishment of a public library in his village because he felt that "Reading rots the mind."

Over-indulgence in reading is certainly a vice, and in the young may prove a menace to character building. Over-stimulation of the emotions with too little physical activity is dangerous. The young girl who reads one sentimental story after another and the boy who is continually wrapped up in tales of adventure while he himself is inactive, are both running the risk of an unhealthy and warped growth.

ON THE READING HABIT

M. VALÉRY LARBAUD, one of the younger French critics, recently published in *Commerce*, a new quarterly of which he is one of the editors, an essay entitled "Ce vice impuni, la lecture."* It is so full of wisdom and so pleasantly written that I venture to give a summary or adaptation of it.

Like all the habits to which we come back with a lively feeling of pleasure, in which we take refuge and isolate ourselves, and which console us, reading is, in truth, a kind of vice! But it is also a vice which gives us the illusion that it leads us to virtue, to a higher wisdom which it enables us to envisage. We have a hope, rather confused, of becoming wiser and happier through reading. It is perhaps only a bad excuse, as

*Later reprinted as the initial essay in a volume of studies published under this same title (Paris, Albert Messein, 1925).

many men,—and a few saints,—have been both wise and happy who did not know how to read.

Experience and statistics show us, says Larbaud with gentle irony, that reading is an exceptional and abnormal habit, like all vice. Normal man reads because of professional necessity or for distraction from his occupation or his work. The people who read for the sole pleasure of reading and who examine this pleasure seriously are few in number. Before the establishment of compulsory education a distinction was possible. There were illiterate classes and lettered classes. This distinction can no longer be made between classes, but only between individuals taken from all the classes. However, one hesitates to say of a man who knows how to read that he is illiterate. The exact word is lacking. One tries various phrases: "A man with little schooling," or "without culture," or "half-educated." One can say it, sometimes, of men of certain trades or occupations, but can one say it of a doctor who reads medical works, of a lawyer who reads legal treatises, or even of an electrical worker who studies the handbooks of his special calling? Can one treat them as illiterate because they do not read literary works, collections of poems, or novels?

Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
Mazarine Gallery
From an unpublished drawing by Eric G. Scott

Les Bouquinistes, Paris

From the color etching by T. François Simon

One avoids doing it, but when we meet a man who through giving himself to reading has become the possessor of a wide literary culture we say: "He is a lettered man." To what is this word "lettered" opposed? How can we indicate the difference between a man who can read and has not read, and a man who has read widely enough to have acquired literary culture and judgment? Illiteracy, in the sense here used, is the vice of many journalists, writers and self-styled critics.

Certainly we do not have the right to preach to our doctor or to our lawyer the advantages and the pleasures which they would gain from the possession of a literary, artistic and philosophical culture. So much the worse for them if they do not have this culture. For us the important thing is that the doctor cure us and the lawyer win our suit.

There are people whose function consists in spreading as far as possible the reading habit. There is, in every civilized country, a class of people who are paid to say to children and to young persons: "Outside and beyond the trades, the professions and the specialized pursuits for which we are preparing you, there exists an invisible, scattered aristocracy, bearing no distinguishing mark, without officially recognized

existence, without diplomas or letters of patent, without temporal power, but nevertheless exerting a considerable influence, often leading the world and deciding the future. From this class have come the truest leaders whom history has known, those who for years and in some cases for centuries after their death, have directed the actions of many men. You can belong to this aristocracy. It invites you. It waits for you, and the only condition of admission which it demands of you is that you apply yourself immoderately and for years to a certain kind of pleasure called Reading." They should add: "This pleasure, like all others, will draw upon you the disapprobation of Puritans and perhaps even persecutions. Your parents, as they see you reading books which cannot help you to pass your examinations and to enter upon a career where you will be self-supporting, will reproach you for losing your time and poisoning your mind. And we ourselves, who are far from belonging to this aristocracy without diplomas, if we happen to find in your hands books of certain so-called present day writers, who are not on our approved lists, we will confiscate them,— for reading is a vice and, like the other vices of children and minors, is punishable."

The Passion for Reading

One could compose, continues Larbaud, a treatise on the birth, successive phases and progress of the passion for reading. It would be concerned with, or at least describe, the route followed by an imaginary reader, who would be made up of the elements drawn from our own experiences and of what we have observed in others. We might at least consider the mass of readers of a single generation as an army on the march,—huge at the beginning. Three-fourths of the children of this generation form part of it. From year to year we should see its ranks clear up, the head of the column thin out, and a large mass of stragglers and deserters gather in the rear or disappear. One could thus combine the schematic history of the reader who persists in his passion with that image of an army or of a mass of pilgrims marching towards the intellectual Athens which seems to recede before them as does the horizon. Our Reader is a unit in this crowd. There is entered in the first ranks our friend "A," who has made himself capable of reading books of several epochs and in several tongues,—and at the rear that old fellow-student "X," who for years

has read nothing more than the newspapers and the illustrated magazines which are to be found on the tables of his club.

One could also appreciate the development of this passion, its stages and its results under the form of an allegory in the manner of John Bunyan: "The Reader's Progress." But no, it is not as an allegory that the Pilgrim's Progress pleases us, but for other qualities, and in spite of the allegory. In any case we can be sure of one thing: it is that the development will have a secret character, exactly like the progress of Christian towards the celestial Jerusalem.

Opened for the first time, perhaps with a feeling of boredom, the covers of a book are a gate which permits a glimpse of a wonderful world of inexhaustible treasures beyond. That is the day when conscience comes to life. Reflection and imagination are there where before instinct alone existed. However, nothing special marks this date of the child's intellectual First Communion. His parents have known nothing about it and he himself would quickly have forgotten the date. Almost immediately afterward comes the epoch of his active collaboration. The name of Jules Verne alone figures on the book cover, but the book

which the child reads is his work in collaboration with Verne. He enriches it with his experience, his feelings, his discoveries, his fondest dreams. He complicates the adventures and he adds episodes and people of his own invention.

School books are altogether different from the works of imagination. They are lacking in style and charm; they fail to attract the student. They ask questions, they affirm, they dogmatize, they order the solution of uninteresting problems.* The first Latin book presents difficulties, cunningly like a trap. But then the pupil comes upon some "Choice Selections from Great Writers."

At this place many pilgrims have renounced going further and those who continue are going to find themselves grappling with a number of difficulties: old style spelling, the difference in grammar or in the meaning of words, the thousand secrets of prosody, and lastly, the ennui which is spread over everything by that detestable word Duty. By chance, quite at the

*Why can not we have more text-books of the rank of James' "Psychology"? The maker of a manual feels that he must limit himself strictly to facts. He must not yield to the temptation of indulgence in a literary style. The man of letters is looked at askance by the scientist. John Burroughs is misprized by the biologist and the geologist. Because of some minor inaccuracies concerning the life of the bee, Fabre is condemned by the entomologist with whom the charm of the French writer counts as naught. The scientist wants the facts, and nothing but the facts.

end of these "Choice Selections" the young reader wandering in the desert, finds a little fountain where he can drink refreshing water: a poem written in a language which is familiar to him, where all the words have the meanings which he has always associated with them, and which express thoughts and sentiments which seem to him to be his own or describe for him things which he believes he alone had seen. He is saved! A new stage is now beginning. All the modern literature of his country appears to him like a promised land where he takes his first steps. On that great day they punished him for not having his geometry lesson! Soon he will have serious difficulties because a novel or the poems of a contemporary will have been found among his books. He learns also that "contemporary" is synonymous with all sorts of worse expressions, such as "bad," "absurd," "dangerous," "valueless," "ridiculous." And they tell him that nothing has been added to his national literature for several decades past.

There is another group of discouraged pilgrims. They are the friends and partisans of Duty. We give them one glance and pass on.

Then comes a period of disorganized reading in all

directions. Both curiosity and vanity add themselves to the reader's appetite. It is no longer only the exquisite pleasure without afterthought. There is the urge to know what there is behind a new name and the desire "to have read all"—and to boast about it.

The Reader's Temptations

This is also the epoch of the reader's new temptations, the first of which would make him love books which appeal to the crudest appetites and to the baser instincts, and to mistake a bit of attractive rascality or a book of political propaganda for a literary work. Then, again, his attraction towards what sparkles, renders him the dupe of the publishers' extravagant advertisements, makes him believe that a celebrated writer is necessarily a good writer, and that an author played in an important theatre is necessarily a great dramatist, while those of whom no one speaks have no merit. Some readers never get beyond this point.

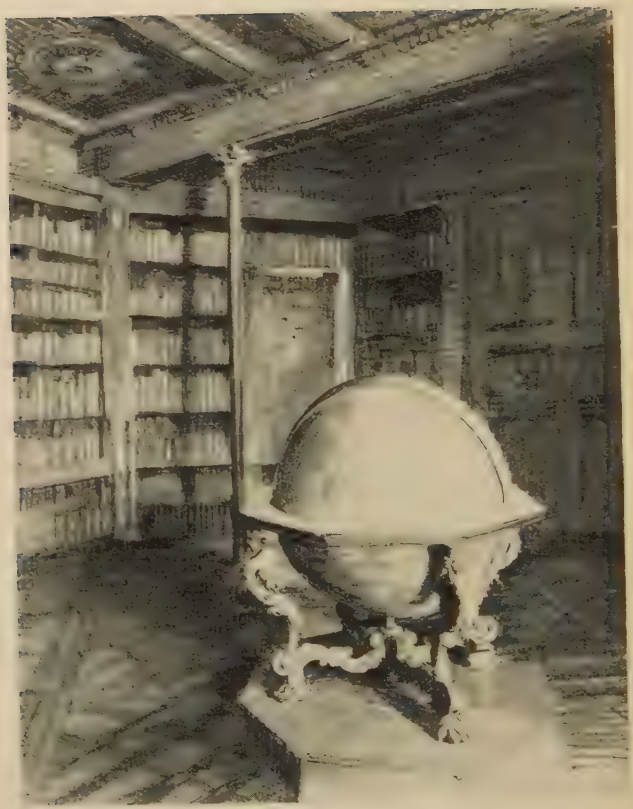
On the other hand, Larbaud points out, there is the temptation to regard as negligible the celebrated contemporary writers. This is less dangerous than the first because, generally, the great books take a long

time to become known. In any given period the best writers are not the best known. This temptation leaves him on the high road, but it will make him worship some unknown gods who will remain such and for whom he will blush later on.

But the beauty of the route in this conquered country is a compensation for these obstacles. Among all the spiritual influences with which the young man comes into contact there is not one which touches life in more points than this literature which he calls modern. It fortifies his conscience, illumines, expresses and furnishes a commentary on his experience,—enriches his thoughts, admonishes him, encourages him, guides and holds him back. It takes him for a confidant, proposes models and lines of conduct, nourishes and develops the faculty which he has of observing himself and of being watchful. It sharpens his wits, puts him on his guard against many lies, makes him feel an aversion to being easily satisfied with himself. It makes him see just what surrounds him, makes him even see the beauty and the attraction of those things which Duty made bitter for him.

But he has passed the great elimination test. He now knows that the old poets with their few hundred

Bibliothèque Mazarine, Paris
From an unpublished drawing by Eric G. Scott



A Corner in the Mazarine Library, Paris
From an unpublished drawing by Eric G. Scott

readers are more celebrated and have more assurance of remaining so than the contemporary whose books are printed by the hundred thousands.

Bibliophilism

However, Our Reader has not yet obtained the high mandarinate which is undesignated by insignia. The selection is rigorous and the tests which raised all these points took place several times a year during the period of apprenticeship. New temptations present themselves. He has loved books too much like material objects,—being enamored of their form, their weight, the texture of their paper, the ease with which they open, the delicious odor of certain ones when they are new. He becomes a connoisseur in bindings. He caresses his books. This form of vice can eventually dominate him entirely and separate him even from reading. He can complacently resign himself to the pleasures of the exclusive bibliophile and entirely lose sight of the spiritual function of the book. He will take up with rare copies and first editions. This is a fine and respectable passion,—and a useful one,—the cultivation of which constructs and convoys little literary Noah's Arks in which works

full of wisdom and of joy have crossed and will cross the floods of history. But among certain of these bibliophiles one notices something like scorn for the other aspect of the book, for that which in our eyes gives it all its value. One would say that for them the authors have been only the unimportant producers of a product which serves to support more important qualities,—to wit: rarity, curiosity and the fact of being a pretext for the display of a great material luxury.

Scholarship

Suppose, then, that Our Reader has easily triumphed over the temptation of the exclusive bibliophile. There is another much stronger temptation,—scholarship, under all its forms: research into the origin and sources of books, comparative literature, the establishing of texts, the verification of attributions, studies on the grammar and the vocabulary of the author; and the biography, where intuition and ability as a detective have such fine play. Is it not towards this that his passion draws him, not only to enjoy the reading of books and to get nourishment from them, but to penetrate into them, to see their intimate structure, to dissect them, to know their

history, to reconstruct their embryogeny, to discover their hereditary defects? If one is facile with the pen, it is in the setting down of all this that he will employ himself most usefully. At the same time this can constitute a career, and the passion will find itself in this way reconciled with material security and honors.

That would be a passion wisely directed and made the most of,—but there is one obstacle! A passion wisely directed and profitably used will soon die out. Another will doubtless replace it: scholarly curiosity, —but this is no more like literary passion than avarice is like extravagance. It is too easily satisfied, it demands too little of that which supports it, quickly deforming and withering it. The man who is exclusively a scholar sees in the books which he reads only that phase which is the object of his study,—the grammarian reads only with an eye to grammatical principles, the philologist sees in the text only the crystallization of a language,—like the doctor for whom a man's disease is more interesting, more real than the man himself. Soon the mere scholar no longer stops to consider the beauty of a literary work. He thinks of its history, of its peculiarities. He feels indeed that he

is no longer *en rapport* with the work, but his *amour propre* tells him that it is because he dominates it, outstrips it, and he naturally believes his *amour propre*. He no longer is in touch with anything but the subject of his study and he ends by being satisfied to live in ignorance of all the rest. He is encysted.

The Literary Élite

Now, one of the principal characteristics of the literary élite is the attention which it pays to contemporary literature. It wishes to follow the development of the traditions of which it knows the origins. The scholar, having forbidden himself this territory, ends by not even wanting to know it,—mistrusts himself in it. He has, so to speak, slipped out of the élite.

But Our Reader, like Bunyan's Pilgrim, has conquered this last temptation. That will not prevent him, however, from viewing with respect the work of scholars on account of the use which it will be to him. He will know their methods of work, will be able also on occasion to put them into practice; but he will not allow himself to be completely absorbed by them.

Finally, the highest grade for Our Reader is the entrée into the great world of books, the acquisition of

culture, the becoming a part of the truly élite. Though the word *élite* may be a little too high sounding, how otherwise designate that small number of men and women so carefully selected, after many tests, from among so many thousands of people? Culture is a quality, something which belongs to the man himself, which contributes to his happiness, which can be indirectly very useful to him, but which will never bring him a single penny,—any more than will his politeness, his courage or his kindness. Culture, it has been said, is the daughter of pleasure, not of toil.

Jesse Lee Bennett's book "On 'culture' and 'a liberal education' " seeks to show that "culture is not something tepid and weak, to be gained by repression and restraint, but a thing vigorous and robust, to be won by the unfolding and developing of the whole nature of the individual. It seeks to show that anyone who sufficiently desires can secure a liberal education without the assistance of colleges or of teachers. It seeks to afford a coördinated understanding, which sets of 'classics' and 'masterpieces' and 'best books' cannot possibly give until mental framework has been constructed into which the various volumes compris-

ing such sets can properly be fitted. Culture is something infinitely more complex than knowledge. Culture is always keen, alive, alert. Knowledge may often be dead, dull, tedious. Culture cannot possibly be gained by frenzied pursuit."

ON READING WITH A PURPOSE

SOME years ago the late Dr. Carl Hilty was invited to address a young people's association on this subject of serious reading. While his address is well known in Germany, it has never been translated into English and I give here a brief résumé of such parts as are of immediate concern to us.*

A few results of experience with reading as the most important means of modern culture can be recorded under three heads. Three simple rules were laid down by Dr. Hilty:

(1) One must read much and regularly.

(2) One must make up one's mind to read only the good, and not the bad or entirely superfluous books.

And (3) one must read the good properly in order to make it a part of oneself.

*"Lesen und Reden," Frauenfeld, J. Huber, 1895.

But there is something more to be said on the form and content of the reading and on the books that merit being read.

First, one must read much in order to acquire such knowledge as is necessary to the individual conduct of life, and also to get a true survey of the whole of life and thought, not only of one's own period but also of the past,—what one may call universal culture. We have plenty of people in all walks of life who are mere technicians and so-called specialists, as we also have those who master only a limited portion of the universal cultural elements of their time.

Still more important is the second rule that one must make up his mind to read only the good and read it himself. Of the bad, as Schopenhauer said, one cannot read too little.

It is moreover entirely practicable, and not a very great art, to cover a large field of reading during an ordinary life-time, if certain simple rules are carried out. The first is that one must accustom himself early in life to read regularly,—daily without exception and at a set time,—even if only for half an hour a day. Anyone who continues this for twenty years will at

THE NEWSMONGER

rom the painting by Adrian van Ostade (1673) engraved by Janinet

Don Quixote Reading the Books
of Knighthood and Chivalry
From a drawing by Tony Johannot

the end of that time belong to the cultivated people of his community, and he who has once accustomed himself to it finds in it an entirely different pleasure from what most people find in their daily recreation. Habit means everything, especially in self-education.

Avoid the Useless

The second presumption is that one reads nothing useless. This is indeed the chief point. For to useless reading (to which we have become only too much accustomed) belongs very much of that which obtrudes itself as reading matter among our so-called cultured nations. Certain parts of our newspapers, the greater part of all illustrated magazines, and moreover the largest part of all novels and much modern poetry belong to this class.

One must, whenever possible, read books in their original language. There are no very good translations and the more ingenious and independent a book is the less is it possible to translate it.

In regard to all really technical writings there is only one good rule: "Do not roam too far afield." From purely professional, technical or scientific concerns which do not advance you, and which you

cannot and will not learn thoroughly, acquire from the best possible source a clear judgment and then let them henceforth alone. With this strict limitation and with the earlier regular reading above insisted upon, the plan to wish to read all really good books no longer appears so rash as it did at the outset.

It also makes one's reading easier if one holds himself substantially to the original and especially if he does not read what somebody else has written on a particular writer. Most literary criticism, for example, is worthless for those who do not know the books discussed, and the books often have the advantage of being shorter than these discussions about them. You can read Dante, Goethe, Kant, or Schopenhauer, not to mention the Bible, ten times over and be thoroughly acquainted with them in their entire contents before you could read the many partly distorted, rambling and superfluous views which such books have gradually collected about them. Moreover, you are the surer of what actually is or is not in these writers. It is unbelievable what huge structures the clumsy or overzealous commentators have built up about every outstanding book!

Methods of Reading

Then a word about the different methods of reading. To read aloud or to be read to (without the physical necessity for it) is not worth much; it is as defective as is the habit of going to too many lectures. Both are merely entertainment. One learns as a rule nothing, and preserves only a wavering incentive to think about a certain subject or to read about it,—but the incentive is neither very strong nor very lasting.

It is better to read to oneself, with suitable pause for reflection if a particular thought takes hold of one. This is not possible when reading aloud or being read to. In the last analysis reading should give men material for their own thinking.

Moreover, there are different suitable methods of reading to oneself that are satisfactory. In every book there are parts or separate passages which particularly stimulate or inform the reader. These one must somehow get hold of and through study try to make his own. In order to make sure and not to trust all to memory some people make excerpts, but this is tiresome and time-consuming, and suggests

study and research rather than the kind of reading under discussion.

The conclusion from all this, which we wish to repeat is this: Begin, without losing courage when you realize the immense amount of reading to be done on any particular subject; and in order not to lose your courage, or if already half lost, to win it back, begin with the most important books. Read the source material when such is available, not the writing at second hand. The next step follows logically: Read only the desirable supplementary literature. Perhaps much of the secondary material will appear to you quite superfluous after you have read the source material, and in any event will occasion less trouble. Most readers follow the opposite plan and therefore never see things as they really are. Many so-called cultured people never read the outstanding books but only what others say about them.* Winckelmann believed that one reason why the Greeks became so inimitably great was because they knew things at first hand while we know what others have said about them.

*"The difficult thing is not to find the good book, but to resign oneself to not reading all the excellent ones."—Jean-Jacques Brousson, *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, 31 October, 1925.

A Systematic Plan

A systematic plan for reading is useful, even if not actually essential. A system in learning is helpful. The main thing is to learn, no matter how. But regularity is, however, not entirely without significance. In the field of historical literature, for example, the most natural order is the historical sequence,—but whether you read first some specimens of medieval literature and then some ancient classics is immaterial, provided you see the two in their proper relations to one another.

The merely scholarly by-product of the commentator is, at least at first, to be avoided so long as it is not absolutely necessary to the understanding of what is read. The contact between the reader and the author should be a direct one. This will be enough for the time being to give strength and expansion to the reader's spirit. If, on the contrary, one reads to show off before others and to impress them, then he cannot dispense with a certain amount of this accompanying learned chatter.*

*"The *nouveau riche* may once bring a gloom to the house decorator's brow by asking him whether the books, too, are included in the sum agreed upon for a complete bookcase, but he will hardly repeat the slip; his first chance of learning how to play the comedy of culture will be seized upon, and improved, and in no time he will know how to avoid dangerous revelations by restricting himself to 'Good thing!' in speaking of a picture, or 'Capital, this!' in speaking of a book. Nay, he may become a master of the jargon of literary or artistic admiration."—Abbé Dimnet, "American Notes," *Harper's Magazine*, Nov., 1920.

Hilty says in conclusion, that one must not overvalue reading and its product, knowledge. The main thing for life and for happiness itself is not knowledge but action. On the contrary, as St. Paul said, knowledge even at the best always remains imperfect and fragmentary. There has never been a man, and there never will be one, in whom it is found in perfection. And all knowledge that does not lead to beneficent action is not only a useless possession but a dangerous one.

Very learned people who hug their learning to themselves are in danger either of becoming self-satisfied pessimists or, if they are clever enough, look at their own learning like the wisest of kings and repeat: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit."

ON THE ART OF READING

"AMONG those who wish to instruct themselves the majority read very badly," said Voltaire. To know what to read is an art and there is a real art of reading.

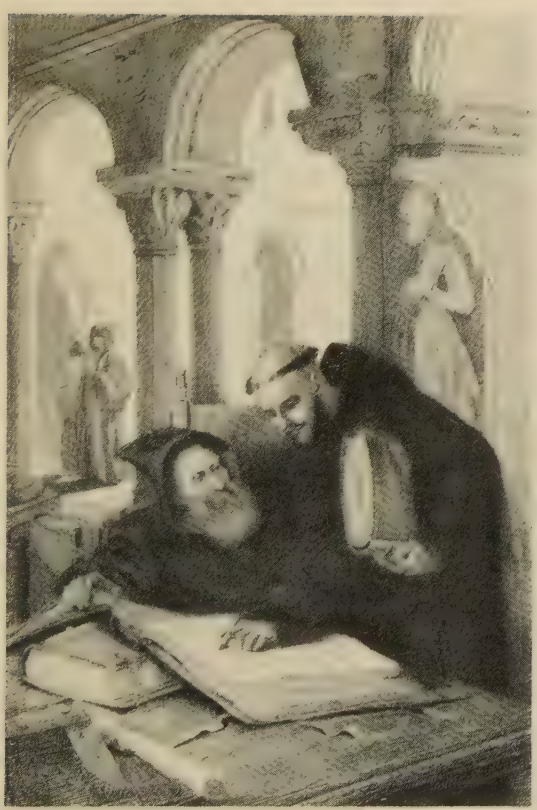
"To read a second-rate book well is better than to read a first-rate book badly," is a pronouncement of Arnold Bennett.

One of the lesser known books of the late Émile Faguet, for many years a foremost critic, a professor at the Sorbonne and a Member of the French Academy, was "L'Art de Lire." The treatment is so original and refreshing and so little known among American students—never having been translated into English—that I am tempted to give a summary of it.

The critic has been described as a man who knows how to read and who teaches others how to read. The critic does not know how to read for his pleasure, and does not teach others how to read for their pleasure.

He teaches the reader how to read critically. To read critically is not a pleasure in itself. In reading there should be no precipitation, which is but a form of laziness. "To read with the fingers,"—a phrase from a previous century,—meant to turn over the pages in a manner where the fingers did more work than the eyes. Makers of encyclopedias, dictionaries and digests read much with the fingers. That is to say, they run through more volumes than they read and they also fall on the essential and curious passages of a book. This is a method of reading characteristic of collectors of ideas or of facts. It takes away all the pleasure of reading and substitutes that of the chase. One who wishes to be a reader and not a hunter will follow the opposite method.

We should read in a very attentive manner and be very distrustful of first impressions. Of course, there are books which can not be read slowly, but they are those which do not have to be read at all. This is the first benefit of slow reading. It makes a distinction at the very outset between the books to read and the books which are only made not to be read. To read slowly is the first principle and one which applies absolutely to all reading. It is the very art of reading in its essence.



IN A BENEDICTINE MONASTERY
From an etching by J. Torné after A. Lynch

THE MEDITATIVE SCHOLAR (KOREA)
From a colored wood block by Elizabeth Keith

Americans have "little of that peace of mind surpassing wealth which the Sage finds in meditation."—Dr. Joseph Collins.

It is quite evident that except for the general precept of reading intelligently, the art of reading cannot be the same for the different kinds of literature, for there are books of ideas, books of imagination, dramatic and lyric poems, and so forth. In reading books of ideas the essential art is one of comparison, the continual bringing together of different ideas. In reading a philosopher or a moralist, he is transformed before our very eyes. We see that such a writer is quite different from what he appeared to be upon first acquaintance. The sentences change in the reading as does a ray of light in passing through a prism. Is this a benefit or an evil? And, then, where is the truth? In the first impression, or in the second, or in the third? Probably our best authors are inexhaustible because of the truths which they contain or the things which we read into them. The essential thing is that they make us think. The pleasure that one finds in reading a philosopher is the pleasure of thinking.

Reading the Drama

Are dramatic poets to be read? Yes, as much as to be heard. If it is true, as used to be said, that a good comedy can only be judged across the foot-lights, it is

no less true that there is a judgment to be passed upon it which can only be arrived at by reading. It is from the movement of the piece that one judges the play at the theatre; but in reading we estimate it from its character of holding together. It is by reading a play that one gets away from the prestige of the theatrical troupe; it is in reading that one is no longer the dupe of the actors, of the energy of the declamation and of the possession which they exercise over us. Above all it is in reading that one can re-read and it is only in re-reading that one can judge well, not only of the style but of the composition, of the disposition of the parts and of the full setting,—that is, of the total impression which the author has wished to produce upon us. And of the question as to whether he has produced it or not, or only done so partially. It is in reading that one can no longer take the false money for the real, the high sounding phrase, more or less true, for a real idea or sentiment. Faguet lays down the tenet that plays can be divided into four classes: those which are better for reading than for presentation on the stage, those which are as good in the study as at the theatre, those which are not so good in print as when heard, and those which are not even worth the

trouble of printing. And it is the first class which are superior to the talent of the actors and which consequently the actors spoil and degrade. All the classical masterpieces are of this class, and the second ones are of average excellence or a little above the average. It is a compliment to a play to say that it can be read. The third class are the many which are below the talent of the actors and which the actors elevate in playing. The fourth class are those which the actors make, those of which the true authors are the comedians who play them,—and these are the most numerous of all.

The author who writes a play for a star does not write at all for the reader, but gives himself up to not being read and in truth condemns his piece as a work of art.

To be able to read a play one must have gone rather frequently to the theatre, for it is necessary in reading a play to see it with the eyes of imagination in somewhat the same manner as one would see it at the theatre. The real dramatic author writes his play, visualizing it at the same time, seeing in advance the actors come and go, grouping themselves here and there, one group speaking to another in this or that

attitude. So the reader must see the piece which he reads as if it were being played, and must also literally hear the lines. If one has been frequently enough to the theatre, one becomes quickly accustomed to read in this manner and so becomes unable to read otherwise. Nothing, moreover, is more agreeable, and this play from the easy chair has no other inconvenience than weakening in us the desire to see plays in an overheated, badly ventilated and uncomfortable theatre.

One of the things which distinguishes a good play from a bad one, a living play from one without life, is that one can visualize the first and one cannot visualize the second. In the same manner that a good dramatist has written his piece while visualizing it, likewise a good reader reads a play while staging it before his eyes.

Reading the Critics

A critic is a friend who talks with you about your reading, reads the same books or has read the same ones. He makes you reflect when he reawakens in you your sensations and impressions. The critic in directing you to new readings opens to you new countries, of which you had only thought vaguely or had never thought at all, but which can be of great beauty or

captivating strangeness. He is sometimes a little too much inclined to admiration, and sometimes his opinions are too conservative or too reactionary, too much attracted towards the novelties of the day. He is a man who makes you read the author from a certain point of view and in a certain attitude which he gives you. Therefore, you must be careful, for it is your duty as a reader to have personal impressions; to be moved by Shakespeare personally and not by Shakespeare according to someone else's impressions. The point of view which the critic gives you is his; so that in a way, to read the critic before reading the author is to hinder you from understanding the author. It is to force one to hear only by an ear which has been prepared by another for a certain impression. Indeed, a certain inertia, or the law of least effort, satisfies one with knowing what the most authoritative critics think of authors without ever reading the authors themselves.

Another fundamental principle of the Art of Reading, according to Faguet, is that one must distinguish between the literary historian and the critic properly so called. The literary historian must be as impersonal as he can be. He does not have to say what impressions certain authors have made upon

him; he has only to say what impressions these authors made upon their contemporaries. He must indicate the general spirit of the times according to all he knows of history. The critic, on the other hand, begins where the literary historian leaves off, or rather he is on another geometrical plane. What we ask of him is his thought on the author or on the work. We do not ask him to give a map of the country, but impressions of travel. We ask what effect a certain author has made upon him.

Though there is a difference between the function of the critic and the literary historian they must be necessarily related. Until recently the literary historian too frequently thought his was the mission of the critic and *vice versa*. It is eminently fitting to read the literary historian before reading any particular author, but the critic should never be read before reading the author whom he criticises. The historian of literature will give you useful information on the world in which the author lived, on the men about whom he speaks and will introduce you into the author's world. With the critic it is different. If you read him before the author with whom you desire to become acquainted he will do more harm than good. You will

not be able, or will be able only with difficulty, to get rid of the point of view of the critic, and to receive a direct impression. The critic will be like a screen between the author and you. You would like to know what effect Shakespeare would produce upon you and you do not know whether the effect which you get in reading Shakespeare comes to you from him or from the critic you have just read.

Therefore, never to read the critic of an author before reading the author himself, never to re-read an author until you have read one or more critiques of that author, is a good rule for both reading and re-reading.

Non multa sed bona et bene

"You might read all the books in the British Museum (if you could live long enough) and remain an utterly 'illiterate,' uneducated person," said Ruskin.

Thoreau found that his cabin at Walden Pond was more favorable not only to thought but also to serious reading, than a university would have been for him. Though he was beyond the range of the ordinary circulating library he had more than ever come within the influence of those books which circulate around the world. He kept Homer's Iliad on his table

throughout the summer though he looked at its pages only now and then, being occupied with incessant manual labor. "Yet I sustained myself by the prospect of such reading in the future," said Thoreau. "I read one or two shallow books of travel in the intervals of my work, till that employment made me ashamed of myself, and I asked where it was then that I lived. The student may read Homer or Aeschylus in the Greek without danger of dissipation or luxuriousness, for it implies that he in some measure emulates their heroes, and consecrates morning hours to their pages. The heroic books, even if printed in the character of our mother tongue, will always be in a language dead to degenerate times. To read well, that is, to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise. It requires a training such as the athletes underwent, the steady intention almost of the whole life to this object. Books must be read as deliberately and unreservedly as they were written."

Reading Fiction

While at times nothing but a book filled with hard facts will satisfy us, there are other times when we wish to revel in a work of imagination and to be lifted

Monastic Library, Subiaco, Italy

From an etching by L. Gaucherel
after a painting by Th. Ethofer

THE LIBRARIAN

From the painting by Eduard von Gratzner
Courtesy of Hugo Schmidt Verlag, Munich

"No profit grows where is no pleasure ta'en.
In brief, sir, study what you most affect."

—SHAKESPEARE.

out of reality. Works of fiction are, in the opinion of Stevenson, the most influential books, and the *truest* in their influence. "They do not pin the reader to a dogma, which he must afterwards discover to be inexact," said Stevenson. "They do not teach him a lesson, which he must afterwards unlearn. They repeat, they rearrange, they clarify the lessons of life; they disengage us from ourselves, they constrain us to the acquaintance of others; and they show us the web of experience, not as we can see it for ourselves, but with a singular change — that monstrous, consuming ego of ours being, for the nonce, struck out. To be so, they must be reasonably true to the human comedy, and any work that is so, serves the turn of instruction. But the course of our education is answered best by those poems and romances where we breathe a magnanimous atmosphere of thought and meet generous and pious characters."

Stevenson found that Shakespeare had served him best, outside of whose characters his dearest and best friend was perhaps D'Artagnan — the elderly D'Artagnan of the "Vicomte de Bragelonne," than whom Stevenson knew not a more human soul, or, in his way, a finer one.

Among English works of fiction, Stevenson rated Meredith's "Egoist" very high. "Here is a book to send the blood into men's faces. It is a satire of a singular quality. It is yourself that is hunted down; these are your own faults that are dragged into the day and numbered, with lingering relish, with cruel cunning and precision. A young friend of Meredith's came to him in agony. 'This is too bad of you,' he cried. 'Willoughby is me!' 'No, my dear fellow,' said the author, 'he is all of us.' "

"I have read 'The Egoist' five or six times myself, and I mean to read it again," said Stevenson, "for I am like the young friend of the anecdote,—I think Willoughby unmanly, but a serviceable exposure of myself."

The fact that what books give us is reflected in our actions was dramatically illustrated by the man who, after reading Bojer's "The Power of a Lie," went to a friend whom he had defrauded and paid back every cent of the money he had stolen, with interest running over a period of fifteen years. The story of the ramifications of a lie had taken hold of his very soul.

"The simplest experience of the world proves that a work of great excellence may deeply move one person, while it leaves another untouched; and that a book

which has influenced one strongly in one's youth may lose such influence over one's later years," says Brandes. "There is practically nothing that every man can read at every time. . . . As a doctor must study his case and cannot obtain his knowledge by reading, thus we cannot learn anything from books unless we learn also from life. If we have no knowledge of mankind, we cannot even enjoy a novel. We are not in a position to judge whether it gives a true or a false picture of things as they are. As proof of this we need only recall the many foolish remarks with which in the course of the year one hears good books dismissed. 'Nobody would feel or act like that' is the off-hand verdict of one person or another who has known only a small circle of people, and never understood anything of what was going on in the minds of those around him. Such persons term a book poor and unreal because it happens to be outside the reality with which they themselves happen to be acquainted, —a reality which is to actual reality what a duck pond is to the ocean."

Theodore Roosevelt gives Mayne Reid credit for having strengthened his instinctive interest in natural

history. He read Reid's novels at a time when he was too young to understand much of them excepting the parts given up to adventures and to natural history. The parents of the young Roosevelt made very little effort to compel him to read books. The son says that they had the good sense not to try to get him to read anything he did not like unless it was in the way of study. He was given the chance to read books that they thought he ought to read, but if he did not like them he was then given some other good book that he did like. There were certain books that were taboo. He was not allowed to read dime novels. He read some surreptitiously, but the enjoyment hardly compensated him for the feeling of guilt. He was also forbidden to read the only one of Ouida's books which he wished to read, "Under Two Flags." Here again he went against parental authority and read it with greedy and fierce hope of coming on something unhealthy. All the parts that might have seemed unhealthy to an older person made no impression on his youthful mind. He simply enjoyed in a rather confused way the general adventures. Like every other normal child he disliked some of the books which he should have liked. Thus, he never cared for the first

part of Robinson Crusoe, and he adds "Although it is unquestionably the best part, I do not care for it now." On the other hand, the second part, containing the adventures of Robinson Crusoe, with the wolves in the Pyrenees and out in the Far East, simply fascinated him. What he liked in the first part were the adventures before Crusoe finally reached his island, the fight with the Sallee Rover, and the allusion to the strange beasts at night taking their improbable bath in the ocean. Thanks to being an embryo zoölogist, he disliked the "Swiss Family Robinson" because of the wholly impossible collection of animals met by that worthy family as they ambled inland from the wreck.

Even in poetry it was the relation of adventures that appealed most strongly to him as a boy. At a fairly early age he began to read certain books of poetry like Longfellow's "Saga of King Olaf" which absorbed him. This served as an introduction to Scandinavian literature for which he ever afterward retained an affection.

When reading a novel that really grips you, you are tempted to wonder how far the author has merged his personality into that of one of his characters,

whether the sentiments scattered throughout the dialogue express his convictions or are simply the opinions of the character as conceived by the novelist. "How far," asks Galsworthy, "should a writer permit his temperament to creep into the texture of his stories?"

What kind of a mental picture have you constructed of the author of "The White Monkey?" Does the picture change after reading his "Saint's Progress" or his "Five Tales?" Galsworthy says that in his day he has been charged with so many opposite faults of temperament and texture that if he had been moved by comment he would have stopped writing out of sheer bewilderment. He says that he has been called a pessimist and an idealist; that he has been criticized for soulless impartiality and for shameless advocacy; for austerity and for sentimentality; for bitterness and for sweetness; for lack of vision and for being visionary; for emotionalism and for lack of feeling; for being a rebel and for being a Forsyte. Surely, if you want a picture of Galsworthy's personality and temperament that will hang together, that will not be a mere composite blur, you must paint it yourself and not rely too much on the critics. "Quality," the story of two

German shoemakers settled in the west end of London, could not have been written by a man with a commercial spirit. Clearly it was penned by a man of sentiment, with an eye for pathos, with sympathy for the lonely, with appreciation of the good and faithful artisan who loves his work more than life itself. In "The Freelands" Galsworthy has put what he could of his affection for the English land. He is convinced that England will never be sound and safe until the land is again what it once was, the very backbone and blood of the race. He feels the revolt which sooner or later will take the best and most long-sighted of the English people back to the open air and to growing the food which they need to make them strategically and economically safe.

So, in each of his novels and plays, Galsworthy has some underlying thought which runs throughout the plot; but if you read only for the plot you are sure to miss the reason for the tale. "We have not *read* an author till we have seen his object, whatever it may be, as *he* saw it," said Carlyle.

H. G. Wells claims that the novel is the only medium "through which we can discuss the great majority of the problems which are being raised in such bristling

multitude by our contemporary social development." And he goes on to say that the novel "is to be the social mediator, the vehicle of understanding, the instrument of self-examination, the parade of morals and the exchange of manners, the factory of customs, the criticism of law and institutions, and of social dogmas and ideas. It is to be the home confessional, the initiator of knowledge, the seed of fruitful self-questioning."

Miss Rebecca West thinks that novels ought to be made hard to read, so that novel reading might become a sort of mental training exercise instead of the light recreation and amusement it usually is. She suggests that the genuine worth-while novel should take two months to read and would have to be read ten times before it was thoroughly understood!

Be that as it may, many will still turn to our classical English authors with whom presumably many of you have at least a speaking acquaintance. As good old healthful Anthony Trollope expressed it: "The habit of reading is the only enjoyment I know in which there is no alloy. It lasts when all other pleasures fade. It will be there to support you when all other resources are gone. It will be present to you

THE READER
From an etching by Meissonier

An Eighteenth-Century Scholar
From a painting by A. Canella

when the energies of your body have fallen away from you. It will make your hours pleasant to you as long as you live."

And may you live long and happily in the society of cultivated readers with whom you can share your intellectual enthusiasm and nourish the life of the spirit!

The Essence of Poetry

BY

SIR RENNELL RODD

THE ESSENCE OF POETRY

IN speaking to you today of the essence of poetry, I should like what I am about to say to be interpreted also as a plea for the preservation of a great national asset, which links you and me alike to a memorable past, that English language, our common inheritance and I hope, our common pride, which has always seemed to me to possess a character and a dignity, and when need be a gravity which few other languages—and I have learned a good many in my time—can boast. Let me say that in the use of that language you seem to me in some respects to have been more conservative than we on the other side. Your great writers have certainly used it with reverence; your most eloquent speakers have conspicuously revealed the value of direct utterance, well understand-

ing that the things worth saying and remembering have always been expressed in simple form, and that there is a suspicion of insincerity in the flamboyant and the baroque. On the other hand, you have perhaps in colloquial speech gone further than we have done in the use or abuse of the syncopated phrase, and we both of us display a growing indifference for what I may call the courtesies of language. You will however bear with me if I speak as we spoke in the days when I first became a lover of poetry, in the days when as a young man I knew Browning and Tennyson and Lowell and Arnold.

Some of my audience may regard my conception of poetry as old-fashioned. But I can not admit that fashion enters into the question. Poetry is, as I hope to show, an emotion or an art. There is no fashion in emotion, nor do I think that fashion affects great art. In any case I do not promise you anything very new or original. I am not concerned with investigating the possibilities of deflected rhythm, or the value of the anapaest as a vehicle of emotion. My desire is to offer you something to think about after I have done, when you will perhaps justly conclude that I have only elaborated the obvious.

We have in our universities, and it may be that you have also here, professors of poetry. I have noticed that these are generally more concerned with discoursing on individual poets than with investigating the rather intangible essence of poetry itself. No encyclopaedia, however, is complete without a disquisition on poetry,—and attempts have been made to define it.

But in the critical analysis of the expert the simple things are often overlooked. And though I had for the greatest part of my life accepted the facile view that poetry must be felt rather than accounted for, I asked myself one day what is poetry, and why has it made so strong an appeal to the ordinary man, in every age and land?

There was little that helped me to find an answer in the traditional authorities. Aristotle has, indeed, formulated principles which still engage the attention of the student. On the other hand, Plato, born to be a poet, deliberately tried, though without succeeding, to turn his back on poetry, and he even went so far as to exclude poets from his ideal State, as a danger to society. Horace, approaching the subject with a logical Latin mind, gave metrical form to certain epi-

grammatical rules which are pleasant to read, but which do not touch the root of the matter. In fact they almost suggest that the more subtle spirit of poetry had escaped the brilliant man of letters. Coleridge said that all poets would go to hell because they were such incorrigible liars, whereas I had always believed that poetry interpreted eternal truth.

Lamartine in his essay on Homer as Civilizer,—taking his departure from the position that poetry is creation, affirms that such creation connotes six elements. The first is memory; the Muses were called the daughters of Memory in the ancient world. The second is imagination, giving color and life to the things remembered. The third is sensibility, the power of making the impressions derived from memory and imagination as real as if they were of actual experience. The fourth is judgment—the sense of order and proportion in coordinating the conceptions of imagination and the phantoms of history, so as to achieve harmony. The fifth element he lays down to be the power of reproducing in language what is felt and seen, giving external expression to what moves us within. And, lastly, the sixth element is the musical sense—because the word made rhythmic or the

A Booklover in the Library of Richelieu
From an etching by A. Barry
after a painting by Mariano Fortuny

GOETHE READING IN HIS ROOM
(Rome, 1786–87)
Contemporary sketch by Wilhelm Tischbein

"Choose well, your choice is
Brief, but yet endless." —CARLYLE, AFTER GOETHE.

word chanted is more beautiful than the word merely spoken. Why this is so he does not pretend to explain. He can only fall back on the answer that rhythm and harmony are two mysterious laws of nature. This is all very charming, but in reality it only describes what the poet's equipment should be. It tells us little or nothing of the essence of poetry itself.

Finally, Edgar Allan Poe, whose own creations at moments belie his theory, asserted the material basis for the things which seem to be of the spirit. He defined poetry as "music combined with a pleasurable idea." Music without the idea was simply music. The idea without music was prose. But he had still to explain what he meant by the *idea*. For the omission is a very large one.

Shelley seemed to me nearer to the truth when he spoke of

—a poet hidden—in a light of thought,
Singing songs unbidden
Till the world is wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not.

There is a suggestion in the unbidden song that stimulates thought.

Now the nearest answer I could find to my self-questioning was along these lines:

Poetry may mean for us one of two things, which are distinct though related.

We may contemplate poetry in the concrete sense, as the expression of thought in noble form, the matter inseparable from the manner, attaining the highest standard only when substance and diction are in equal proportion of excellence.

Or we may have in mind a certain abstract quality which irradiates circumstance, and reveals to us what we feel to be the poetry of life, a poetry which exists quite independently of its expression in articulate speech.

Is it not perhaps the virtue implicit in this secondary sense, which is really the primary condition, the inspiration of the art which interprets it, and which, when apprehended and crystallized in the language that most appropriately and suggestively reproduces the spiritual value, sets the highest stamp on concrete poetry?

And — may it not be just because there exists such a poetry of things, corresponding to a sensitive and responsive instinct in ourselves, that poetry in concrete

form has been the earliest mode of sustained expression with civilized man, and that it appears to have an infinite range of expansion?

This, then, is the text on which I shall try to enlarge. There is a poetry of things and a sensibility in man to apprehend it. There is also an art of poetry by which the poetry of life becomes communicable.

"Poetry," Matthew Arnold once said, "attaches its emotion to the idea." And the idea is immortal. The generations pass and carry away with them all that Sir Walter Raleigh summarized as the "far stretched greatness, pride, cruelty and ambitions" of ephemeral man. But the poetry of his life endures. Religion replaces religion, as the new phoenix rose from the ashes of the old; their influences have waned as what once seemed so substantial in their inspiration faded into the phantom world of illusion. But the unconscious poetry of those religions survives.

And thus poetry in its continuity through the ages abides with us as the interpreter and critic of life, as precious if not more precious in a sense than history, because of its love of the essential truth and its analysis of human motive. This may seem a paradox. I will return to the point a little later.

Each succeeding age will have and will appreciate its own appropriate poetry. It is true that there must be pauses and intervals in great production. I would hazard the opinion that every age will have the poetry it deserves, and a survey of literature in relation to history would, I think, corroborate the justice of this view, which does not exclude a virtue and a pathos from the poetry of decadence.

But of the less worthy epochs little or nothing will survive, seeing that at best only a small portion of the output of any age can reach the standard of perfection which continues to make a human appeal independently of time or environment.

In the present age of acceleration, of restless excitement, of wideranging diversification of interests, even self-expression in poetry seems in danger of being touched by the infection of circumstance. It shows a tendency to manifest itself in spasmodic snatches, in brief outbursts of fugitive emotion, often almost destitute of form or melody; sometimes it would even appear to be seeking to startle and repel rather than to attract. A feverish striving after originality, which seems to be universal today, is perhaps really an indication of general mediocrity. Owing to this straining

to attract attention by originality, a subversive spirit has also invaded pictorial and plastic art, where the ugly and the amorphous have contested the established throne of beauty. But this is, I believe, only a passing phase, and its manifestations have been due to a failure to perceive the poetry of life, which it is the function of concrete poetry to interpret.

A century ago, Lord Byron, certainly a *poseur* in his early days, did much to encourage the idea that a poem could be thrown off without an effort. It was consistent with a certain pretentiousness which he then affected, to convey the impression that he attached but little importance to a facile accomplishment. But—however we may esteem the result—there is abundant evidence that after his first sentimental phase Byron himself labored strenuously and took his poetry seriously.

One almost suspects some of the writers of today, like the painters, of being over-anxious to arrive quickly, and of asserting a new liberty because they have not had the perseverance to learn the technique of their craft. And yet without it, the eight or ten lines of very free verse which we encounter at the top left or right corner of an otherwise blank page,—even

when they contain a thought which might be worth preserving,—fail to make any definite and lasting impression.

Even art appears to be subject to the law of evolution, with alternating cycles of ebb and flow. The poet is an artificer or maker, as his name implies. The presentation of the poetry of life in language is an art, and great poetry is high craftsmanship directed by that unbidden impulse which we call inspiration. Mastery of form is one of the tests of the artist. Form alone may be meaningless, but mastery of craft is assured only by the imposition of form.

Within the limitations of form,—and it is susceptible of infinite variety,—the poet reflects the manifestations of nature, or the emotions and the dreams of men. But without form he will lend no permanence to thought.

In art, then, as in all human affairs, progress is not by violence. The benefactors of humanity are those who appreciate and realize the laws and conditions which govern the evolution of the race. From time to time the world throws up a superman, who endeavors by violence and ability to shape the course of events to his will. But the achievement of the super-

man is ephemeral, and those silent forces which work, subject to no visibly appreciable control, resume their unobtrusive way. The action and the failure of the individual may be revealed both in the large field and in the restricted field. The Napoleons and Bismarcks of history appear for a moment to have reconstituted the world and to have usurped the place of destiny. But even a German historian—a contemporary of his apogee—was known to say "This Bismarck is only an episode," and of what he accomplished little more than half a century ago, much has already been undone. It is apprehended, I think, by all deeper students of history, who look not at single events but regard the whole spirit of historical evolution, that violent interference with the order established by the long succession of time will always lead to reaction. I believe the same to be true in art.

M. Emile Cammaerts, the Belgian poet, spoke in London a year or two ago of a phenomenon peculiar to the English language, nonsense poetry. He perceived a measure of art in nursery rhymes and found them delightful, because although the meaning was forced to suit the rhyme, this was done without hypocrisy. I quote him because he here negatively

touched an essential quality of poetry. Art must be sincere. There is nothing more antagonistic to real poetry than hypocrisy. The poet's garden, where the sensitive plant is grown, may be a thing of beauty, but the garden of verse transplanted from the botanical dictionary is intolerable. Not much less so is the artificial assemblage of exotic words unused in normal diction, or the deliberate juxtaposition of incongruities in verse, when they are not frankly combined for the joy of the absurd. In the early education of children poetry should, I think, hold a far larger place than has hitherto been assigned to it. Many, if not most children, have an instinctive sense of the poetry of things. An experience I have derived from the observation of my own children has been that the young appreciate rhythmic assonances and color and even felicitous phrase long before they grasp the full value of the poet's meaning. Great poems committed to memory in early youth "cleave to their lives" and come back to them after many years with a fuller humanistic meaning, and nothing will more effectively contribute to the purification of language than the filling of the young receptive mind with great examples.

HARPER MEMORIAL LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
Viewed from the Court. From an etching by Owen Selkirk.
Published by Roullier, Chicago

AN OLD BOOK-SHOP, CHICAGO
From an etching by Ralph Fletcher Seymour

But, I ask myself, would anything touch the responsive sense or remain with them if they were invited to assimilate some of the free verses which we are asked to recognize as poetry today?

Attempts have been made to define poetry. But they seldom touch more than one of its many aspects. Nor is it necessary to look for definitions. Poetry has too many moods, modes and uses for classification or analysis.

We are indeed accustomed broadly to distinguish between epic, dramatic, and lyric poetry. But even these overlap. There are passages in the *Iliad* as dramatic as any in the Greek tragedies, while the chorus in the latter use only the lyric mood. Poetry again has racial and chronological differentiations. Drama, for instance, seems peculiar to the western spirit, and has little part in the literature of the East. The poetry of the Latin peoples tends to be concrete, its emotion is clearly defined, while the poetry of the northern peoples is rich in the suggestion of a larger meaning unexpressed.

The one common characteristic of the highest poetry, as of all great art, is that it is immediately and universally recognized.

We might assume, when emotional, pictorial and musical utterance are so blended that each seems an essential part of the other, that poetry has achieved its end. But the little blue flame which distinguishes inspiration from mere grace and felicity, the magic which has caught and interpreted the poetry of things, still escapes analysis, and, though we may suspect the presence of some law of harmony to which our being responds, we cannot explain why the imposition of form and rhythmic movement confers an additional value to the thought which stirs our emotion.

Our estimate, therefore, and the test of great poetry can derive only from the contemplation of the examples which offer a standard for judgment. *They* have the universal quality which is independent of time or place or circumstance. We recognize their permanent influence throughout the known ages, beginning with the lyric ecstasy of the *Song of Solomon*, or the bitterness and beauty of the *49th Psalm*, which the revised version has done its best to diminish, or the first human record of a new revelation struggling with an orthodox belief in the problem poem of the *Book of Job*.

Let me recall a few examples. There are two lines in the *Iliad* which seem to me to touch the highest

note of human pathos. They follow those which describe how Helen of Troy, looking over the ramparts with Priam, recognizes all the leaders of the Achæans, but cannot see her own two brothers, and wonders whether through shame for her they have withdrawn from the throng of warriors.

> Ὣς φάτο, τοὺς ὁ' ἤδη κατέχεν φυσίζοος αἶα
> ἐν Λακεδαίμονι αὖθι, φίλῃ ἐν πατρίδι γαίῃ.
>
> *Iliad*, III., 243–4.

"So spake she, but those two long since life-giving earth enfolded, away in Lacedæmon, in their own dear native land."

There are fragments of Sappho,—take the lines addressed to the evening star,—which we cannot read without a thrill after five and twenty centuries:

> *Hesper, thou bringest homeward all*
> *That radiant dawn sped far and wide,*
> *The sheep to fold, the goat to stall,*
> *The children to the mother's side.*

There is Virgil's picture conveyed in five words of the dead on Lethe's bank, whose outstretched arms

express their longing for the other shore: *tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore*, which seems to me to contest with Dante's *Amor, che a null' amato amar perdona*, "Love, which insists that love shall mutual be," the claim to be the most concentrated single line in poetry.

The mention of Dante brings us to the threshold of the modern world. The large munificence of his great epic makes any selection difficult.

Supreme poetic insight and courage are revealed in that passage in the *Purgatorio* where Manfred tells the manner of his death and redemption. A keen imaginative sense is shown in the last journey of Ulysses in the 26th canto of the *Inferno*. The drama of human passion has never been conveyed more simply or with greater mastery than in the story of Paolo and Francesca.

Then in our own language—open your Shakespeare where you will, and the example will hardly fail you:—

> *I am dying, Egypt, dying, only*
> *I here importune death awhile, until*
> *Of many thousand kisses this poor last*
> *I lay upon thy lips.*

Or Hamlet's

If ever thou didst hold me in thine heart
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story.

Or, in more recent years, recall the exquisite symbolism in Browning's *Paracelsus* of man's first uninstructed impulses, all tending upwards:

Like plants in mines which never saw the sun
But dream of him and guess where he may be
And do their best to climb and get at him.

All these, from epic or dramatic poetry, of course are enhanced a hundred times in value by their content.

In lyric poetry the special virtue may reveal itself in a poem as a whole, as a perfect work of art from which no stanza, no line, could be removed without marring its completeness, such as Shakespeare's sea dirge, *Full fathom five thy father lies*, Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, *The Highland Reaper*, Shelley's invocation *To Night*, Manzoni's *Cinque Maggio*, or Browning's *Prospice*.

You may find in such lyrics a thought not very profound, presented in words so felicitously conceived to convey its content, so beautiful in cadence and in color

that the poem seems to have reached the perfection of lyric expression, as, for instance in Goethe's *Ueber allen Gipfeln*—or you may find thoughts which are profound or suggestive interpreted in language of naïve simplicity, as in Blake's *Tiger*, in *The Future* of Matthew Arnold, or the *Du bist wie eine Blume* of Heine with its 37 monosyllables out of 47 words:

Du bist wie eine Blume
So hold und schön und rein;
Ich schau' dich an, und Wehmuth
Schleicht mir ins Herz hinein.

Mir ist, als ob ich die Hände
Aufs Haupt dir legen sollt',
Betend, dass Gott dich erhalte
So rein und schön und hold.

So fair and pure and holy
So like a flower thou art,
I watch thee and grow ware of
An aching in the heart.

I should like my hands to rest on
That head of thine in prayer,
That God might keep thee always
So holy, pure and fair.

Or, again, the convincing essential quality of great poetry may dawn upon us in isolated lines like

> *And beauty born of murmuring sound*
> *Shall pass into her face.*

Or

> *I cannot see what flowers are at my feet*
> *Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs*
> *But in embalmed darkness guess each sweet.*

Or even in a single line, like

> *He hath outsoared the shadow of our night*

and many more in the *Adonais*.

But there is no need to further multiply examples. We are all familiar with the passages which hold to our hearts the touchstone of immortality, and by their test we may measure what we feel we shall never fully explain.

And now let us return for a moment to poetic truth.

We have all of us, no doubt, met the individual who tells us quite sincerely that he has never known anything said in poetry which could not be better said in prose. There would seem to be something lacking in such a constitution, akin to the lack of the musical

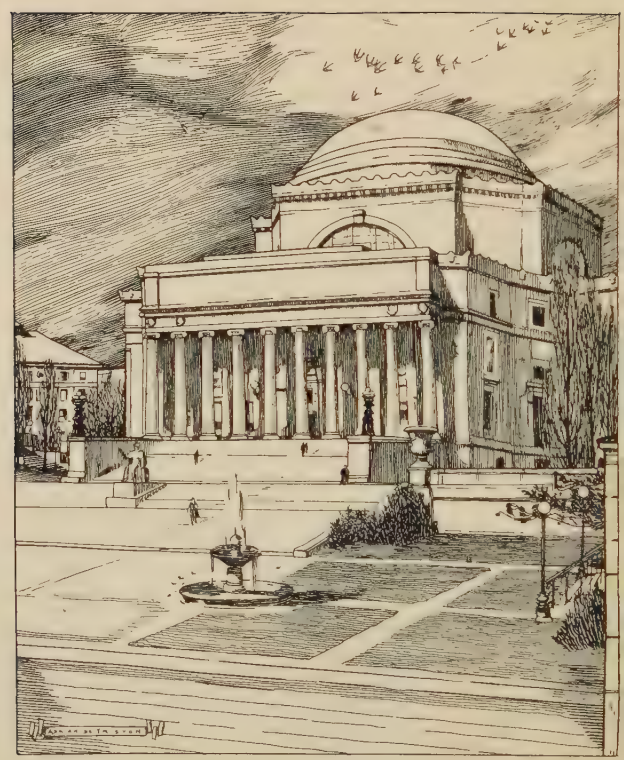
sense in others. Of course the answer, or part of the answer, is that many things have been said, and can and will be said in poetry, which would never be said at all in prose.

Little things of everyday life, the tenderer reasons of the heart, emotions which we should be reluctant to betray in normal speech, or which would pass away with the spoken word, once prisoned in gracious form, assume a new importance and make an insistent appeal.

In contrast with the type to which I have referred we also encounter today, less rarely than in the sceptical 19th century, the man of science who realizes the debt he owes to the inspiration of the poetry of life.

But it is not only in the frank revelation of intimate things that the influence of poetic truth is felt. Out of the mass of action in the past, certain deeds, certain situations which poetry has made its own have assumed a legendary quality and touch popular imagination. That legendary quality may perhaps not correspond so closely to material records as it does to spirit, because the instinct of the poet who has possessed it has rather seized the essential which might escape the anatomist of history. So illuminated by

GROUP OF READERS
From the Alexandre Dumas, père, statue in Paris



Columbia University Library
From an unpublished pen-and-ink sketch
by Adrian de Friston

the poet, these essentials radiate light and beauty through the obscure recesses of the vault of time. The poet furnishes throughout the ages an atmosphere or ambience which softens the cruder outlines of history. The historian records action, but the poet makes the action human, and productive of the same emotions as though it were actually taking place before us.

How little might we know of the essence of chivalry without the *Songs of Roland* and the *Cid*, or the *Romaunt of the Rose?*

How inadequately should we grasp the spirit of the Middle Age without a Dante?

How much less should we know of that wonderful people to whom we may trace so much of our literary inspiration, were it not for the happy preservation of the thousands of little lyrics in the Greek anthology, which reveal to us the intimacies of domestic life, the kindly relations of master and slave, the love of animals and nature, and the craving for communion with the soul of the world two thousand years ago.

Let me quote you one or two examples—in English renderings, since not everybody is a student of Greek. This, for instance, of Addæus of the fourth century B.C.:

The ox of Alcon was not sent to the slaughter, when at length
Age and the weary furrow had sapped his olden strength.
His patient toil was honored, and in the deep grass now
He strays and lows contentment, enfranchised from the plough.

Or this of Perses, also of the fourth century, written for a rustic shrine of Priapus or Tychon:

I am the god of the little things—in whom you will surely find
If you call upon me in season—a little god who is kind.
You must not ask of me great things—but what is in my control
I, Tychon, god of the humble—may give to a simple soul.

Or the very human note in the epigram of Damegetus of Phocæa, two centuries later:

These words, renowned Phocæa, were the last Theano said,
As she went down into the night that none have harvested;
Hapless am I, Apellichus, beloved man of mine,
Where in the wide, wide waters is now that bark of thine?

My doom hath come upon me and would to God that I Had felt my hand in thy dear hand on the day I came to die.

There are many hundreds of such little lyrics which I might quote, which call to the heart across the centuries and give eternity to episodes and emotions of the vanished lives of long ago.

Considering these things, are we not entitled to say that while history has for the most part been the archivist of material accomplishment and failure, of apogee and decline, the revelation of the soul throughout the ages has been the poet's gift to humanity?

And this could not have been but for another essential characteristic of poetry, its function and privilege of self-analysis. In poetry the human soul has been able to declare itself, naked and unashamed, unfettered by convention or reserve. Again, I cannot explain why this is so, unless it be that the poet being a maker, Ποιήτης, can only fashion out of what he knows. In actual life he may be inconstant, dissolute; he may be many other things besides being a poet—a soldier, a man of business, an official or a surgeon's apprentice. But in so far as he is a poet, when that

power within which prompts him gains utterance through him, he enters into another world. The singer of the song unbidden admits no reticences, he sloughs off conventionalities and deferences and becomes his own higher self.

Walt Whitman, who often probed to the substance, if he missed the form, at times struck out an illuminating phrase. He said: "The great poets are to be known by the absence in them of tricks, and by the justification of perfect personal candor."

The poet may speak with such personal frankness as the mouthpiece of another into whose life he has been able to enter by sympathy. So by the poet's apology Paracelsus is purged of the sins of ambition and charlatanism and dies pressing the lamp of God.

Or he may be the revealer of his own real self, rejecting the secrecy of the confessional and inviting public absolution, according to the measure of his frankness.

When in that splendid outburst, stripped of all affectations and ironies, Byron at last spoke as a true poet with his own real voice, in the passage which concludes,

But there is that within me which shall tire
Torture and time and breathe when I expire.—
Something unearthly that they reck not of,
Like the remembered tones of a mute lyre,
Shall on their softened spirits sink and move,
In hearts all stony now, the late remorse of love.

he convinces us, as none of his most eloquent advocates could have done, that the harsh judgments of a century ago must be revised. And with this note of frankness I have concluded my summary of the qualities which make the poet and stamp great poetry.

I have not sought to point a moral. If indeed there be one indicated in the suggestions which I have put forward, it would be the warning note never to lose sight of the poetry of life. In the modern world, especially in epochs of great prosperity, inducing what is known as a high standard of living, a thing which is no doubt desirable in itself, there may be a counterbalancing danger, a belief that we can dispense with poetry; a spiritual barrenness, a tendency to reduce the average of a people to a common denominator of the commonplace and, as a result, a failure to appreciate in life the things which make it worth the effort of living.

Let me in conclusion only sum up what I have tried to convey to you as the best answer I could find to my question: What is poetry?

There is a poetry of expression and there is a poetry of things, which many feel who "cannot tell the world." When the latter is faithfully reflected by the former we reach the highest poetry.

Poetry takes account of both great things and little things. In art they are equal. What matters is the manner of presenting them, and the sincerity and truth which are essential.

Poetry is the interpreter and critic of life, the mirror of the human soul, which by that medium has revealed itself throughout the ages.

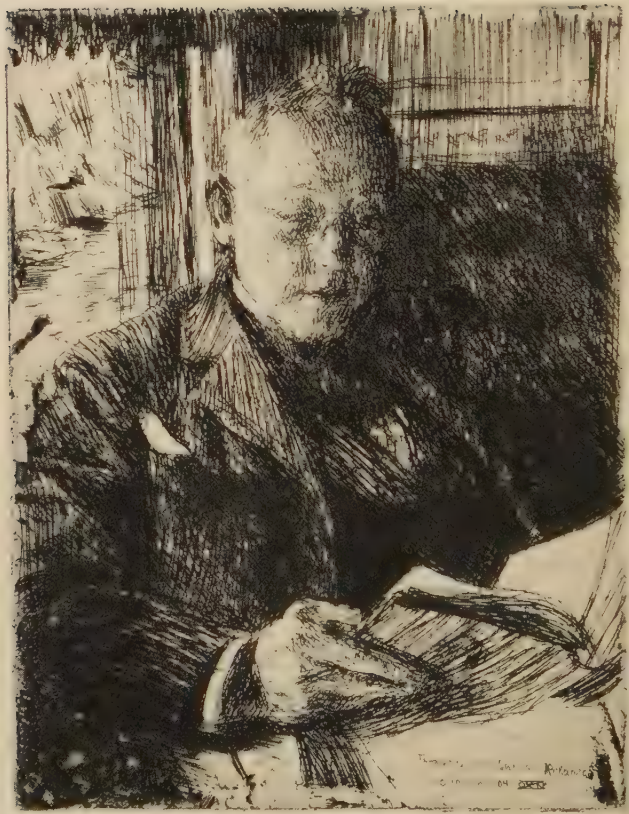
Standards of Value in Fiction

BY

FRANKLYN BLISS SNYDER

READING

From a portrait study of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Deering by Anders Zorn



THE TRAVELING COMPANION
From an etching by Anders Zorn

STANDARDS OF VALUE IN FICTION

ONE hundred and eighty-five years ago, an obscure London business man named Samuel Richardson spent six weeks writing a volume of letters. When this volume was published it became overnight the most popular English book since Pope's *Homer*, and ultimately exerted a far-reaching influence on the world of literature. Before the appearance of this astonishing book there had been fiction of a sort, both in England and on the Continent, but it had remained for this fifty-year-old printer to give to his readers that combination of fascinating love-story, believable characters, and adequate background which has made the novel what we know it to be.

And surely, the omens were auspicious at the time this newcomer arrived in the field of letters.

Ministers in their pulpits and teachers in their class rooms united in praising the wonderful book. The mistress and her maid found a new and common interest, and wept, in sympathy and in unison, at the dastardly scheming of the villainous "Mr. B." At Slough, the blacksmith read the story aloud to his neighbors gathered around the shop door, and when at last Pamela, triumphant, led her master and persecutor to the matrimonial altar, the villagers rang the church bells and thanked God that virtue had been rewarded.

Here, they might have said, is a new sort of book, in comparison with which all others seem insipid and dull. Here is a pocket theatre, to be carried about and enjoyed at one's leisure, which pictures the manners not of lords and ladies of high degree, but of simple, workaday folk like ourselves. Here, printed in a language that all of us can understand, is a story of a poor serving girl who betters herself by marrying her master, who shows us how we too may rise in society, and who admits us to that most alluring of all shrines, a woman's heart. Small wonder that the novel was praised wherever English could be read or translations procured, for never

before in the history of civilization had there been anything like it.

Yet how simple the whole matter seems to us, sophisticated critics of today! When you write your novel you need do little more than bring two young men and one young woman into reasonably close juxtaposition (only the hardiest will venture that more fearsome combination of two women and one man), and, presto! the action has begun—action that will end only when the clash of rapiers in Hyde Park has startled the drowsy watchman, or when the paternal "Bless you, my children," has welcomed the elopers home.

Yes, it is a simple formula, this three-leaf-clover pattern that lies at the basis of most novels; yet what possibilities for good and for ill are concealed within it, and what enormous potentialities were latent in this type that Samuel Richardson added to the library of civilization!

For if you will think a moment you will realize that the novel is not a mere idler's toy or plaything. It is the most popular type of modern literature. It has been—it still may be—a powerful influence upon the destinies of mankind. It was in a novel that Haw-

thorne preached once more the age-old sermon that the wages of sin is death. It was in another novel that he came to grips with the most baffling of all human problems, the reason for the existence of sin and suffering in what we believe to be a divinely ordered universe. It was by means of his novels that Sir Walter Scott, just a hundred years ago, was entertaining not a nation but the whole world, telling his tales of

> *Old, unhappy, far-off things,*
> *And battles long ago.*

It was through his novels that Dickens reformed a brutal school system, pleaded the cause of the aged and poverty-stricken, and as his crowning achievement, made it possible for England to hear once more the happy laughter of little children. It was a novel that sent the men of '61 swinging South with muskets over their shoulders, summoned to the battlefields of Virginia not by any interest in the abstract question of States' Rights, but led on by their faith in Lincoln, and by the vision which Mrs. Stowe had shown them, the vision of the bruised and broken body of poor old Uncle Tom. It is by their novels that the writers

of today are making the world laugh and cry, and sometimes even think.

No, the novel is not merely a "type" to be studied in college class rooms, or a means of whiling away a summer afternoon. It is one of the great and impressive facts of modern life.

If I am right in thus estimating the significance of the novel, I shall hope to be pardoned for thinking that we may well spend an hour in trying to get at some ideas concerning the standards of value which it is proper for us to insist upon in the fiction that we read. Are there any such standards at all, some one may ask. Is there any body of doctrine which will aid a person in making up his own mind concerning the merit of the books on his library table? Is there any objective test, any criterion of a formal sort, such as we admit in the case of the sonnet, which can be applied to the novel? What, in short, do we mean by the commonly used phrase, "a good novel"?

Phrased thus succinctly, the question is one which admits of a thousand answers, and we may be sure in advance that no one of them will be entirely satisfactory. What is a good novel? As well ask, says my critic, what we mean by a pretty girl, a beautiful day,

a successful life. Each person will answer the query in terms of his own experiences and prejudices, and every answer will leave much to be desired. My idea of a good novel or drama is sure to be different from yours, just as—so the psychologists tell us—my impression of the world of color and form and sound is certain to be unlike that of any other person.

Yet despite the obvious impossibility of ever saying the last word concerning this problem of literary standards, I believe we can accomplish something. We can make it easier for us who read books to help others in their choice, and can make it possible to give a reason for the faith that is in us when we treasure one volume and discard another. I believe that there are certain fundamental standards of value in fiction, as there are in life itself. Moreover, I believe that by insisting, so far as we have the power, that our novelists give us books which attain to these standards, we can do something to enhance the value of American literature, and so to enrich and ennoble the life of the American people. For—let me say it again—the novel is one of the great facts of present day existence. It is an index of the spiritual temper of the people who read it. It may be, it

should be, a means of enriching and beautifying American life.

When I have said this, I hasten to disclaim any belief that the purpose of the novel is in any direct way to teach or to preach. I had my fill of that "Be good and you will be happy" type of fiction long ago, in a Vermont Sunday School library. What a collection of unreadable books that was! What cruelty to the minister's children to require them to "draw" one volume each Sunday! Yet we did it, my brother and I, wondering how without supernatural aid such dullness could be got into print, till finally we discovered the one real treasure amid that mass of rubbish: "Putnam and the Wolf." The title was alluring, for every New England school boy had heard of Israel Putnam and his revolutionary exploits, and knew in particular how he had once gone down into a wolf's den, and with his bare hands had torn to pieces the ferocious animals that attacked him. So I hurried the book home, secretly wondering how it could have escaped the board of censors, and the last spoonful of Sunday ice-cream was still cold on my tongue when I had begun to read. The first sentence told the story; more I have never read: "As General Putnam descended

into the cave to do battle with the wolf, so must we struggle against the demon of intemperance."

No, it is not the function of the novel to preach: its influence upon life must be exerted indirectly. Just as a beautiful picture lends its influence to the room in which it hangs, and subtly touches to finer issues the lives of the people who live near it, so a novel may have an influence for good, and never exert that influence in any direct way. But only a *good* picture, only a *good* novel, can thus affect us. And this brings me back to our central problem, What is this good novel?

I shall not try to define it, but will be content with suggesting three qualifying adjectives, and will add that when you can say these three things of a novel, a poem, or a play, you are reasonably sure to be dealing with a good play, or poem, or novel. And the adjectives are merely these: *interesting: true: well-written*. Show me a novel concerning which you and I can agree that it is interesting and true and well-written, and I will show you a good novel.

Simple, is it not? Perhaps too simple to be true? Well, before condemning the formula, suppose we look for a moment at the three adjectives, trying to make up our minds concerning the significance that

attaches to each, and then consider an objection which some persons are sure to interpose.

First of all, then, a good novel should be interesting. When I have said so much, you instantly ask, interesting to whom? To the trained critic and student, or to the casual reader? To the book-reviewer, whose profession may be thought to qualify him to judge in such matters, or to the person who turns to fiction merely for rest and relaxation?

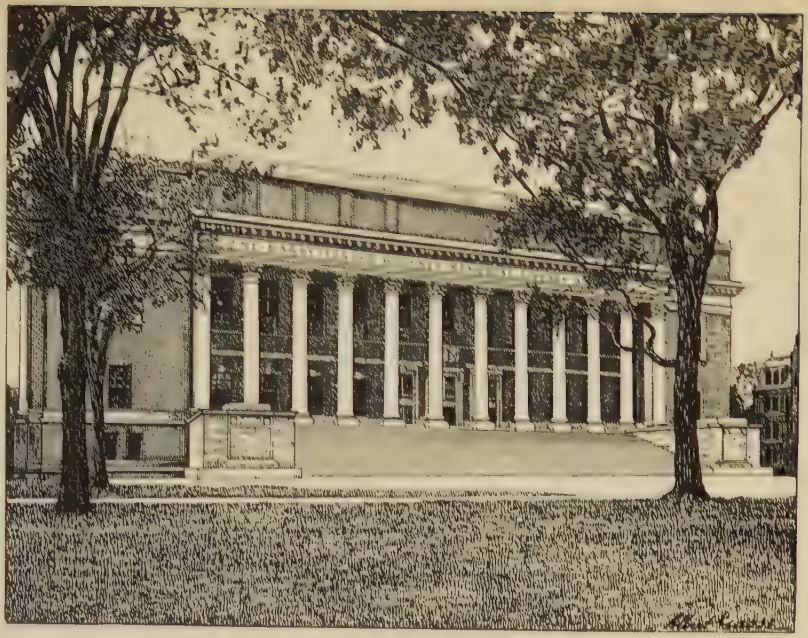
The possibility that the "average reader" and the professor of English may disagree in their verdict upon a book was brought forcibly home to me not long ago when I was spending a day in the club car of a transcontinental train returning to Chicago. Across the aisle from me sat—call him John Smith, reading a novel. By half past five, when dinner was announced, my neighbor had finished his story; and as he started for the dining car he held the book out to me with pleasant geniality. "Say," he said, "there's the best thing I've read in ten years. Don't you want to look at it?"

I thanked him and took the book, and in an hour had turned the pages of what I realized must be the

season's worst novel. It purported to be a tale of life on the north side of Chicago; but the Chicago it pictured was not the one you and I know, and the heroine was a milk-and-water creation whom one could neither love nor actively dislike. The story was not interesting; the book as a whole was a collection of lies. It was written so crudely that any tyro could have pointed out a score of faults. Yet my friend enjoyed it, and actually proposed to take it home to his wife and children.

By the time he was back in his seat my hurried review had brought me to the last page, and I passed it across the aisle with a casual "Thank you," only to be met by the direct question, "Say, now, what did you think of it? Wasn't it a regular corker?" For a moment I hesitated, and then—foolishly, perhaps—allowed my pedagogical conscience to get the better of my good manners. So I told him, not as directly as I have told you, but still with emphasis, what I thought to be an approximation to the truth concerning the book.

When I had finished the sermon my friend said two things,—one that hurt, and the other that salved the wound. "Oh, I see," was his first and almost



WIDENER MEMORIAL LIBRARY, HARVARD UNIVERSITY
From an unpublished pen-and-ink sketch by Albert Gasse

INNER TEMPLE LIBRARY, LONDON
From an unpublished pen-and-ink sketch by Albert Gasse

unforgivable remark, "I see; you're a highbrow." Then, as I wilted under the accusation, he added, "Well, to tell the truth, I wouldn't have thought it to look at you." The *entente cordiale* being thus restored, we let drop the question of standards of value in fiction, and spent our last hour discussing golf balls and the relative merits of the mashie and mashie-niblick.

Now, here was the problem presented in concrete and definite form. Mr. Smith, a business man of some standing in Chicago, thinks that novel nothing less than "a corker." I consider it worse than useless. Which of us is right?

In the case of this particular book I know that my judgment was better than his; but if on returning to Chicago I had found that not only Smith but some thousands of other people were reading and praising that novel, if I had found that its vogue endured after the advertising campaign had ended, if that book had attained any genuine and wide-spread popularity, then I should have concluded that my standards of value were in need of revision. For it is my belief that the world of literature is in a large way a democracy; that just as the average man and woman elect our presidents and governors, and in the long run

choose rather well, despite occasional mistakes, so it is the same average intelligent reader, and not the occasional critic or teacher, who establishes our literary standards and pronounces the verdict upon works of art. No, literary popularity is not a sign of mediocrity, as some persons seem to believe. An enduring popularity is one of the surest signs of merit. If all the John Smiths in America like a book, and keep on liking it for some time, the chances are that it is a good book.

Of course, there is a sort of popularity that has nothing to do with merit of any sort, a popularity that depends almost entirely upon skilful advertising. We are gullible people, all of us, despite our years of experience. We would buy a shaving paste or massage cream made of ground glass and concentrated lye, if it were sufficiently advertised. To be sure, no one of us would buy more than one tube of the concoction; but the sales would bulk large the first month, and meantime the manufacturer would be safe in Honduras. Similarly, we will buy almost any sort of book that the advertisers tell us to buy, provided always that after a month or two we may forget the book entirely. A three months' popularity is of no impor-

tance in determining a novel's merit; but the novel which really attains the distinction of being a "best-seller" for a year or more, is almost certain to be in some way a "good" novel.

If you think I am overstating the case, turn some day to the files of *The Bookman*, see what novels we Americans have crowned as "best sellers," and then tell me whether or not I am absolutely wrong. You can work out the lists for yourselves, as I did once, and you will see that in the last thirty years only one or two insignificant books like "The Harvester" have been thus distinguished, and that nearly all the novels we have pronounced good by this simple method of buying them in astonishingly large numbers are books that we can be glad to have on our shelves. In the list you will find Miss Ferber's "So Big," the Pulitzer prize novel for 1924. Here, too, is "Main Street," possibly too much talked about, but obviously a novel of distinction. Here is Mr. Churchill's "The Inside of the Cup," the only book that held first place for two years. Here is Mrs. Wharton's first great success, "The House of Mirth," and Westcott's "David Harum." (Apropos of that last title, by the way, it is worth remembering that the "critics," the readers

of thirteen publishing houses, declined Mr. Westcott's manuscript before one could be found to take a chance on printing it. These trained experts were sure they knew what the public taste would approve. They were certain that "David Harum" would never "go." So the book was rejected; and only by chance did it ever see the light!)

In this same list of "best sellers," indicative of America's willingness to turn to European markets for novels as well as fashions, you will discover Sienkiewicz's "Quo Vadis" and Ibanez' "Four Horsemen," Sir Gilbert Parker's "Seats of the Mighty," Kipling's "The Day's Work," Hutchinson's "If Winter Comes," both "The Outline of History" and "Mr. Britling Sees it Through," and Miss Sedgwick's "The Little French Girl."

Now these are good books. One need not argue the point; they are books which the crowd admires and which the critic praises. Apparently, if one really gets at the facts, this test of popularity is not one which we need fear to apply to our fiction. Consequently I come back to the first of my three adjectives with the faith that you will interpret it as I do, and will agree with me that when we find a genuinely

interesting novel, a novel that can interest large numbers of readers, and can hold their interest for a reasonable length of time, then we are at least one third of the way on our search for a good novel.

One third of the way; but to take the second step we must find a novel which is true as well as interesting.

True—truth—the words have never been easy of definition. What do we understand them to mean when we apply them to fiction? What do we mean when we say that a good novel must be a *true* novel? That the events described between the covers of the book actually took place? That when O. Henry begins a story with the words: "Every Saturday night the Clover Leaf Social Club gave a hop in the hall of the Give and Take Athletic Association on the East Side," we are to believe that this actually happened? Of course not. The truth in O. Henry's volumes of short stories is not truth to historical fact; it is—shall we call it—truth to human nature. The men and women who move in his pages may never have lived at all, but who cares? The important thing is that they play their parts in the game of life according to what we

believe to be the rules of the game. The result is a sort of truth that may actually transcend historical veracity, and is the only sort that the writer of fiction need be concerned with.

I have recently been enjoying the pleasant experience of re-reading "Ivanhoe," that old school-day favorite, and of finding it still fresh and vigorous and compelling in its interest, despite the lapse of over a century since Sir Walter first penned it. In this old tale one finds much that one can designate as true. Here, to begin with, is that sort of antiquarian truth in which Scott so delighted. Here you may learn the exact dimensions of the tournament lists, or the precise garb of a Saxon swine-herd. In matters such as these Scott was meticulously exact. But it is not this sort of truth that keeps "Ivanhoe" alive; rather is it that higher sort which appears as Scott creates his characters and sets them moving in the play. Few of them ever lived, so far as flesh and blood existence is concerned; yet how living they are, how true they are! Cedric himself, Rebecca, Isaac of York, Front-de-Boeuf and the Templar—these, we say, are men and women, not characters in a story. These persons are more alive than you and I who discuss them. They

have already attained their immortality. They are true to what we consider the fundamental facts of life. Who cares whether their names ever appeared in a Register of Births and Deaths?

No, we do not ask the novelist to tell us stories that could be sworn to before a notary. All that we ask is for him to tell us believable stories,—stories in which the action and the characters unite to impress us with the fact that the book as a whole is a faithful representation of life—of life as it is, or as it once was.

It is the novelist who can not or who will not do this, of whom we are sure to tire. The fundamental defect of certain novels, such as some of Harold Bell Wright's, is their lack of this large sort of truth. Interesting they may be, in a way; but by the time you have finished one of them you have come to the realization that the tale as a whole is untrue, and that you have been wasting your time reading it. For, really, the child's instinctive preference for a true story, "a story about you when you were a little boy," is a sane and normal preference. Giants and fairies may do for a time; but before many years have passed over his head the youngster intuitively turns away from these earlier favorites, and begins asking

for what you and I are quite right in demanding,—stories in which he can believe. Yes, interest is the first essential of a good novel, the second as surely is truth to life as we know it.

Does this mean that the intelligent reader must forsake romance, and turn only to those somewhat depressing tales, those realistic transcripts of existence, which by all the signs are true? Of course not. Romance has its place as well as realism. As long as human hearts grow tired of the world as it is, so long will there be a place for the story that tells us not of the world as it is, but of the world as it might have been. As long as we find ourselves wearying of the somewhat dull round of day-to-day existence, so long will we welcome the tale which takes us out of the routine, and transports us in a Faust-mantle to a different world. The Chicago river is a muddy stream at best; the beaches of Lake Michigan are somewhat dirty and littered after a storm; the lake itself is a muddy brown as often as an opaline blue. What a joy, then, to go a-voyaging on the old three-decker that is forever "taking tired people to the Islands of the Blest," to forget the rattle of the elevated road and the clang of the ambulance gong, and to listen

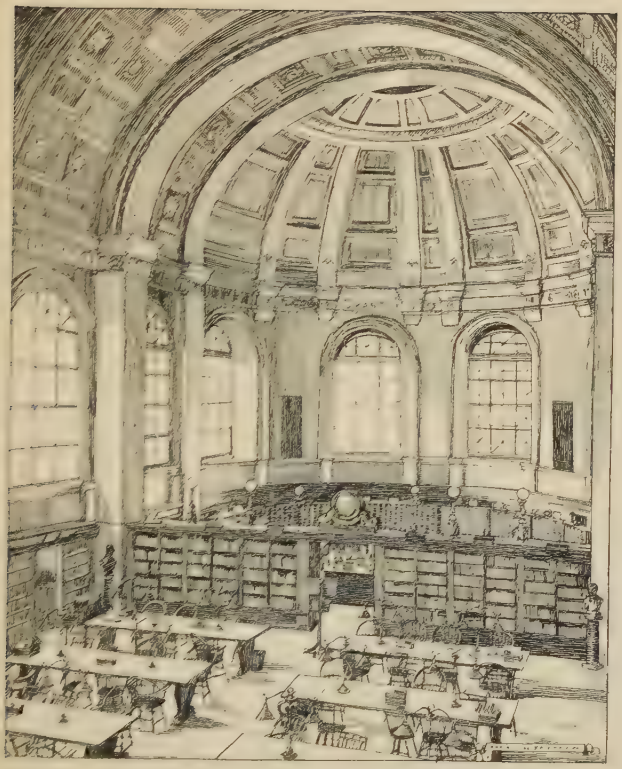
to the temple bells of Mandalay, or watch the Pacific breakers crash on their coral reefs. But even here, even in this field of romantic fiction, the books that will please us most are the books in which we can find characters like ourselves—men and women who live lives not such as ours actually are, but such as ours might have been. Yes, even in the field of romance this fundamental truth to human nature is a necessary element.

Having said so much, we can go one step further, and add that even a really good fairy story must be a true fairy story. I was once a week-end visitor in a home where a six-year old lass declined, one evening, even to consider going to sleep, until her father had told her the customary story; and as the story-teller had been detained in the city, I was pressed into service as an emergency substitute. Moreover, I was informed that the story could not concern a big engine or a sail boat, but must center around a little fairy princess.

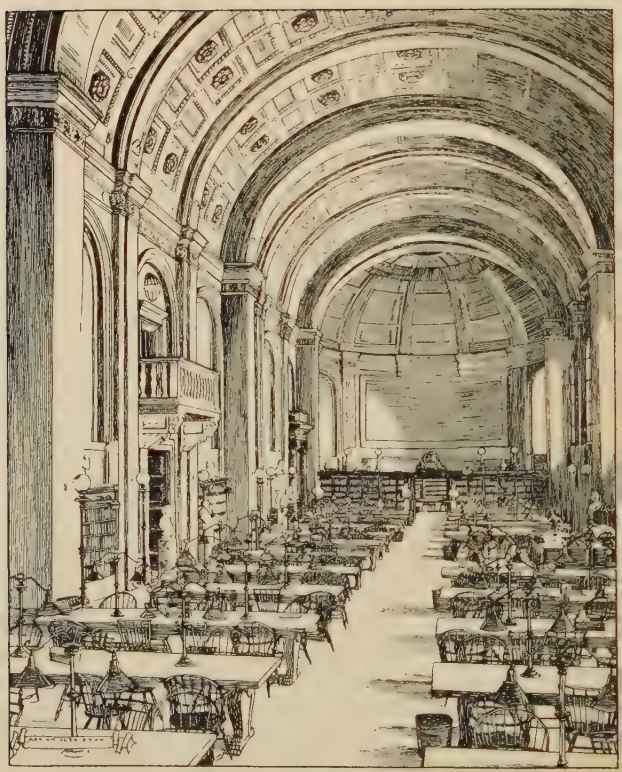
I had not read a fairy story for some years. I had never told one in my life, except perhaps some unofficial "fairy stories" that my elders always detected. However, there was no alternative open to me. So I

conjured up a golden-haired, blue-eyed little lady, much like the one lying there in the bed before me; sent her wandering through an enchanted wood where griffins lurked; and finally brought her face to face with the most hump-backed, hook-nosed old hag of a witch that ever tottered out of a spidery cave. Then I hesitated. Should I make the old beldam boil her little visitor for dinner, or should she treat her more kindly, give her a supper of Cream of Wheat and prunes, put her to bed, and perhaps hear her say her prayers? The second alternative seemed the one most likely to bring rest and peace to my youthful auditor, and so I adopted it. But when I reached the "Amen," and looked cautiously to see whether by any chance those blue eyes were shut, I found that I had chosen the wrong conclusion. "Witches doesn't act that way," was the only comment; "they eats little girls."

Do you see the point? My six-year-old critic had learned that even a fairy story, to be a good fairy story, must be true—true to what she considered the fundamental rules of the game. How much more important that a novel, which purports to give us a cross section of the life not of witches and little



BATES HALL, BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
From an unpublished pen-and-ink sketch by
Adrian de Friston



Bates Hall, Boston Public Library
From an unpublished pen-and-ink sketch by Adrian de Friston

princesses but of men and women, be true to the conditions under which men and women exist.

Interest, then, first of all; and second, truth: these are two of the standards of value which I believe we should insist upon in our fiction.

But before proceeding to the third and last point, let me stop a moment to register my conviction concerning a type of book somewhat prevalent today, a type of book which all of us would condemn as pernicious, but which is defended by some persons on the ground that though unpleasant and even filthy, it is admissible as good fiction because the stories told and situations described and instincts analyzed are "true." If you and I maintain that only a true novel can in any real way be a good novel, some people will distort this to mean that any true novel must be a good novel, and will shelter their unpleasantness behind the shield of truth.

The question need hardly be argued at any length, for it was all settled long ago. Just as surely as an obscene picture, no matter how well painted, should never be hung in any gallery, so the novel which parades indecencies before the reader is not worthy

of a place in the library. There are, as every one knows, certain phases of life which the physician and psychopathic expert must deal with. What we sometimes call "conditions" exist in the life of every community. We do not, however, discuss these matters at the dinner table, nor need we exhibit them in novels. Unless our friends who write books for us can write clean books, books that will give us pleasure, give us information of a sort that a normal man covets, and that will leave us a little happier, a little better than we were before we read them, why, they had better never write books at all.

I know such doctrine sounds unconscionably prudish in this era of liberty and enlightenment. It smacks of the "mid-Victorian"! But never mind; the best things are always the clean things, in fiction as in life; and surely we can afford to side with Thackeray and Dickens, with Mrs. Deland and Miss Ferber, and let the garbage-can school of fiction go its way to certain oblivion.

The garbage-can school of fiction: do you know, I rather like the phrase, and I am waiting for the chance to apply it—personally—to one of my acquaintances who deals in material of this sort. Really,

I think the designation is well deserved by some of our contemporaries; the only trouble with it is the fact that it is not mordant enough, it does not carry the rebuke which the writers of this sort deserve. For I had much rather my nameless friend should litter my study floor with rubbish, than that he should soil the minds of my children with the filth of society's gutters. A rug can be washed and cleaned, and be but little the worse for the whole experience; but I know no magic potion or cleaning fluid that will eradicate a filthy idea from a boy's mind.

But enough of this. I have wished only to suggest my reasons for believing that the second of our adjectives, "true," might perhaps be qualified by the adverb "cleanly."

What then remains to be said about the last of the triad, about this indefinite, unintelligible, relative, and altogether unsatisfactory epithet, "well-written"? What does it mean, when applied to fiction?

Frankly, I do not know; or at least, I can not explain what I think it means. I can no more define this third quality of a good novel than I can explain just how the odor of a geranium differs from that of a

violet. I like one, and dislike the other; but to put into words the exact "why" of this preference, is beyond my power. Similarly, I know that when one of my friends opens his piano and begins to play, I am sure to turn to the library table for a magazine. But when a fifteen-year old neighbor of mine does the same thing I drop my book, forget the unread papers before me, and listen, wondering at the magic power of that immature lad. I have even seen the ashmen stop their truck and turn off the motor, that they might enjoy for a moment the music floating out to them through the open window.

Can you explain the difference? I cannot. There is the same instrument for both people to play on—the same cunning combination of wood and steel and brass and ivory, mute till some one touches it to life. And here are the two performers, with the same physical equipment of bone and muscle, the same power of coördinating mind and body. Both have a technical skill which anyone would pronounce admirable; but when one plays we listen half-heartedly; the other—ah, you say, he must have the soul of a musician. Yes, one can play the piano; the other has the soul of a musician. I wonder whether some sim-

ilar distinction does not hold good in fiction, and whether that is not about all that we can say.

One thing I am sure of: there is no objective test that can be applied to the novel, no standard pattern, conformity to which means excellence. Kipling reminds us that

> *There are nine and twenty ways*
> *Of constructing tribal lays,*
> *And every single one of them is right.*

What is true of folk song is true of fiction. Hawthorne's pattern is different from Scott's. Scott's has little in common with Meredith's. What, then, is the common term for which we are seeking? What is the charm which the great novelists possess? Will you think me guilty of too flagrant an evasion if I answer in a single word: *style?* They all knew how to tell stories, these masters, and in addition they had the souls of great artists. The result is what we call *style.*

You think that this is too indefinite, too uncertain to be of value? You wonder that a teacher of English can not be more precise in his analyses? Tell me, can you explain why, among your score of intimate

friends, some two or three stand out with special vividness? Why, when you are planning for an afternoon of golf, do you think first of a special person? He doesn't play as well as many another man; he really isn't in your class; but somehow you telephone to him first. No, you can not explain it, any more than I can explain why, when I meet a group of new students in a lecture-hall, I inevitably find myself wondering who that man, that woman, may be. I do not select the prettiest girls or the best dressed men. I do not myself select any one from the entire crowd; but, before I have met that group half a dozen times, four or five members of it have impressed me with their personalities. *Personality*—how much the word means! How impossible it is to define it, or even to describe it!

Now, what is true of men and women is true also of books. Here is one book that has an interesting story, that seems true enough in its essentials, but that leaves me unmoved. And here is another, like Mr. Hutchinson's "If Winter Comes," that possesses the subtle quality which we call *style*. When you find it, you respond to it, you glory in it. For *style* is the one quality without which literature can not be. Subtract it, and you have mere journalism. It is the

magic touch which transforms the book of today into the book of next year. It is the cement, the mortar, which changes the pile of brick and stone into the enduring monument. This I know, and know too that no critic, no analyst, no experimenter with tones and rhythms in a laboratory, has ever been able to solve the mystery. The expert in analysis can tell us something. Take, say, the last paragraph of Lincoln's first inaugural, and compare it with the paragraph which Seward wished Lincoln to use, and the comparison will reveal many things of interest. But the mystery still remains unsolved. The next time you sit at your piano, remember Browning's comment:

Here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,
Existent behind all laws, that made them and lo! they are!
And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man,
That out of three sounds he frame not a fourth sound but a star.

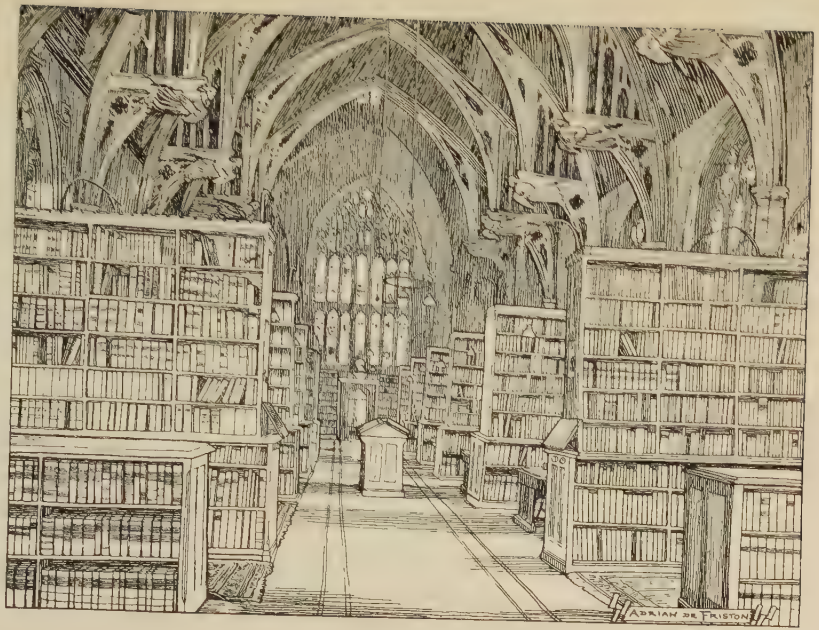
Consider it well: each tone of our scale by itself is naught:
It is everywhere in the world—loud, soft, and all is said:
Give it to me to use! I mix it with two in my thought:
And there! Ye have heard and seen: consider and bow the head!

Perhaps this is all we can say concerning the music of words. Certain we are that the well-written novel is

the novel with *personality*, with *soul*, with *style*. If this seems so vague as to be utterly unsatisfactory, I admit that I can go but little further down the path, and take refuge in the words of Carlyle: "Believe it thou must; understand it thou canst not."

That is about all that I have to say to you on this matter of standards of value in fiction. If our novelists can write books that are genuinely interesting, that are true, and cleanly true, and that have in them the magic touch of style which marks the hand of the master, then I say they have written good books, and deserve their royalties ten times over.

Well, these are simple, and for the most part, old-fashioned ideas. They have not been drawn from the study of Sherwood Anderson and Michael Arlen. The editors of the *Dial* would take issue with them (if, indeed they be not wholly beneath the attention of such modernists) on the ground that they are cut to the pattern of 1776 or 1826, and are hopelessly out of fashion today. "He is only a college professor," I can hear one of these Menckenites say. "Only a college professor. He doesn't know that life has changed a lot since his grandfather was alive.



MIDDLE TEMPLE LIBRARY, LONDON

From an unpublished pen-and-ink sketch by Adrian de Friston

THE LONDON LIBRARY, ST. JAMES'S SQUARE

From an unpublished pen-and-ink sketch by Adrian de Fristau

Naturally he hasn't found out that literature has changed too, and that the standards of a century ago have no place in the world of today."

It is an objection which I believe we should be willing to meet. If our literary standards are those of a hundred years ago, and if meanwhile life has changed in any fundamental way, it seems quite probable that the modernist may be right, and that we should revise these standards so that our literature may be attuned to the spirit of the modern age, and not allowed to lag a century behind the rest of civilization.

Here, of course, the material question is simply this: Has life changed, in any of its fundamental aspects, since the days of Thackeray or Scott?

Some time I shall give myself the pleasure of stating my side of this question to an unregenerate modernist, and what I shall say—if I keep my temper—will be something like this: "Yes, my friend, I think I understand. You live in this new era, which you somewhat naïvely think is the first age of transition through which society has ever passed. You are sure that your world is entirely different from that of your great-grandfather; and accordingly you want to throw away all his standards and ideals, and substitute new

ones. He lived in an age of spinning wheels and prayer meetings; and you—you own two motor cars, and are negotiating for an aeroplane. You are different, different in a good many ways, from that grandfather who worked sixteen hours a day tugging a reluctant living from a stony farm in Connecticut.

"But think a minute, my boy. When you sit beside the pretty daughter of your father's partner in that new roadster, your sensations are not so very different from those of the farmer lad driving his 'best girl' home from choir practice. When you have a touch of the grippe, you ache in every bone and joint of your tired body, just as your grandfather ached when he was sick with what the country doctor called the distemper. If you are sick too long, some one will bury you just as they buried your grandfather; and your six feet of earth—after the spring has spun a coverlet of green—will not look so very different from those of the old-fashioned man. The cycle of his life was the age-old round of birth and growth, of love and labor and death. Your life will follow the same track. Your clothes may be different, but in the essential matters you and your grandfather are surprisingly alike."

Would my statement carry any weight? Does it suggest in any way the proper answer to the modernists in poetry, in painting, in fiction, in education — to those people who demand a general overturning of old standards to meet the changed conditions of modern life? Life changes, to be sure, as the tide ebbs and flows; but beneath the surface human existence is still—human existence. The task of reacting to its problems with courage and honor is still what it was twenty centuries ago. Neither the basic principles of human conduct nor those of art have altered much since the days of Aristotle.

Is it not all pretty much a matter of getting used to the tides? Less than two years ago a small boy said to me, after his first week on the coast of Maine, "Daddy, I don't like this water as well as I do our lake at home. The ocean changes too much." And change it does: twelve feet is a generous rise and fall. The lad who goes down to the sand to play may well be puzzled at finding the beach covered beyond a man's depth, and the solid promontory from which he expected to sail his boats shrunk to a fragment of an island. Yet, after all, how few less changeable parts of our continent there are than that same rocky coast of

Maine. There it is, with its deep-cut bays, its spray-washed headlands, its green-clad islands lifting their shores from the sea, and its cluster of blue hills looking down upon even bluer waters. There it is, just as it was when John Smith made that first map, or when Leif Ericson peered from the prow of his viking ship and called his fellow rovers to look upon Monhegan's mile of ocean palisades.

Yes, I think it is largely a matter of getting used to the tides, be they those of the ocean, of literature, or those more deeply moving tides that embrace all the affairs of men. Once one has adjusted himself to these periodic ebbings and flowings, he will not long fail to perceive the enduring quality, the permanence, of what lies beneath. And of all that endures from age to age, the principles of æsthetics seem to have been handed on to us with perhaps the least change. The things that were beautiful when the Judæan shepherd sang his songs on the hillsides, or when the Parthenon shed its glory over Athens,—these things are beautiful still. Nay more, the instinct for beauty, the compelling urge to express truth in beautiful and permanent form, these persist, though Rome falls and the kingdoms of her conquerors are lost in the ruins.

Consequently I shall not feel much concern over the modernists' attack upon these old-fashioned standards; and if the issue of the conflict ever seems uncertain, I shall hope that you will be willing to strike one blow for those simple and unchanging values that enrich our fiction; yes, for those enduring values that beautify and ennoble all life, and that alone make human existence worth while.

PRINTED FOR
THE UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON
BY
R. R. DONNELLEY & SONS COMPANY
AT THE LAKESIDE PRESS
CHICAGO

Date Due			
O 6 - '37			
OC. 6 T O			
DEC 4 - 1939			
NOV 23 '43			
MAR 3 0 '54			

814.49 K76

86

a39001

49

K76

71770